

Halo 3: Fighting the Good Fight

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Category: Halo

Genre: Adventure, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2004-11-21 05:52:30

Updated: 2006-11-05 02:53:56

Packaged: 2016-04-27 00:21:35

Rating: T

Chapters: 14

Words: 30,851

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: An ongoing series about the culminating Halo Crisis. Master Chief and the Arbiter must work together if they are to forego the Great Journey. Can the Earth survive this conflict? Chapter 14 Up. Reviews welcome.

1. Continuity

Chapter 1: Continuity

"Sir to finish this fight" replied the Master Chief with utter confidence.

"What in god's name is that Chief? Where the hell have you been all this time?"

The Master Chief clicked off his comm. line. He was inside the vast control room of the Forerunner's ark. The roof above him was 100 feet high and was about the width of a baseball field. There was a series of steps, hundreds of them, leading to a raised platform at the end of the room. In the wall before him, was a huge pane of forerunner style impenetrable glass. The entire room glowed a mixture purple, violet and pink. There were dozens of doorways leading into the room on many sides, and a huge gate, that an army 100 Brutes wide could step through at once. He felt certain unease in such an open area. He knew at any second, the prophet and the entire surviving brute guard could enter and disintegrate him in seconds.

He was held into place by a dozens of mechanical cables, an unmistakably forerunner control panel rested before him. Some how, with some primal instinct that rested within him, he knew exactly what to do to manipulate the ship to his every whim. Looking out the glass window, he could see hundreds of Covenant ships, around earth's orbit, fighting for every kilometer of space, as where dozens of MAC cannon satellites and Terran craft, just as hell bent to deny them of that space. Every now and then they would launch huge salvos of magnetized rounds the size of a Boeing-747 at an intercepting course

of a Cruiser, bursting them into halves or tearing straight through them from bow to stern turning them into flaming hollow shells of super heated metal, their hulls popping and glowing with heat.

The Master Chief activated the ships weapons system, feeling the colossal power in the palm of his hands, he surged the ship forward with every fiber of his will into the greatest concentration of ships he could findâ€|

The inside of the control room was thick with tension as the three officers stood fixated on the Holographic console and the Monitors words.

Sergeant Avery Johnson was not patient man.

"Well, where is it!" He repeated growing more irate by the second.

"The Ark? Why I would be happy to compliment you query withâ€|" The Monitor tried to answer but was cutoff in mid sentence.

"That's it! What t did you just call me! I saved your ass from that Brute andâ€|"

"'Sarge, I think I should handle this." Said Commander Miranda Keyes stepping in.

"Upload the coordinates to the Ark to our Scarab," she ordered 343guiltyspark.

"I must do as the reclaimer asks." He beamed with joy and hovered through the air happily, gliding towards his destination. Soon he was out of sight and the sound of his humming even grew faint. The Arbiter, the Commander, and the Sergeant could only wait. Wait while whatever had the keys to the galaxies destruction drifted towards Earth.

2. Objectives

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh, look out!" a Golden Elite yelled and then dived forward to avoid a barrage of brute grenades. They ricocheted around and exploded harmlessly against the many boxes of ammo and popping harmlessly against the structures walls.

Miranda, Johnson, and the arbiter quickly recalled their weapons and returned fire at the brutes perched on the walkway high above them leading to the index control room were they all presently resided. Several of the elites who had survived the brutal massacre at the hands of Tartarus picked up some Carbines and returned fire while weaving back and forth to avoid the idly bouncing rounds of fiery hell and shrapnel. The Arbiter rolled from behind his hiding spot and fired three shots before diving for cover from a barrage of enemy fire. The first shot picked off the brute's leader's helmet, the next two hit him right between the eyes and he died falling off the prepuces of the walkway. The other two reverted to their primal form and sprinted right off the platforms and to the Arbiter's disbelief managed to leap unto the main platform. The small force of elites and

humans all fired desperately at them as they charged toward their positions. When it became apparent that they weren't slowing down, they all bounded desperately out the way as they crashed through all of the crates turned firing nests. One elite had mistakenly held position and continued firing with dual plasma rifles, confident that they would suffice. Both of them pinned him against a wall with the care and finesse of a barbarian and every bone in his body snapped, all of his muscles were crushed and his ligaments began to bend at odd angles underneath his own weight. He fell into a messy and crumpled heap and emitted a long cry.

After the kill their minds seemed to lag, and they stood there, brimming and shaking with rage and staring stupidly into space. The Arbiter in vengeance of his people's spilled blood, ruined him with one swift upwards thrust of his Plasma Blade from behind and the good Sergeant drilled a particle beam through the back of the other's head.

Far off in the distance they could hear another squad of brutes coming.

"More of the enemy approaches, at least a half dozen judging by the stench and the bellowing." said an Elite in a particularly bitter and spiteful tone.

"GO FIND OUT WHAT'S TAKING THEM SO LONG!"

He was correct and over the edge of the platform they could see six or seven brutes mercilessly firing away with their grenade launchers of their namesake. The mid level in which the Arbiter and company occupied was being bombarded by dozens of grenades indiscriminately thrashing every unfastened object around in a baptism of fire.

The brutes so preoccupied with their blissful labor had failed to notice the vanilla-armored elite running towards them at full sprint. Half way across the long and narrow platform he activated his long battery powered sword and leaped the length of the remaining walkway and landed into the formation of brutes. With all the might and fury he possessed, he slashed the energy sword across the backs of three brutes and instantly killed the three brutes in one swift move. Their cries in the throes of pain alerted the other three simian fighters. Two of them berserked towards him and he turned off his sword and grabbed a grenade in both hands and primed them. As the two Brutes charged in his direction with the intention of killing him, he calmly sidestepped and the charging bulls missed and ran past either side of them. He calmly attached a plasma grenade to each of them, they stopped running and skidded across the polished walkway and for a fleeting second, they realized what had happened and cried out in horror. Their cries however were nearly silenced by the deafening explosions.

"Usurper!" the white elite accused pointing a long finger at the remaining brute with his non-sword wielding hand. He reactivated the sword but the Brute reacted quicker than his comrades. He brought the blade of his brute shot down hard on the top of the white elite's helmeted head and he flinched in pain. He repeated this again and again until he knocked him into the other direction. Through the strikes from his fist and the blunt weapon he regained control and heaved the crackling slice of energy at the Brute Captain and it sliced through his arm and even cracked into his ribs.

"AHHHHH YOU FUCKER" the Brute Captain roared profanity at the Special Ops Commander.

The brute slapped him hard causing him to fall over. He got up quickly but with his back turned to the brute. The brute seized the chance to hit him repeatedly with the grenade launcher turned punishing ram and knocked him repeatedly in the back and the back of the skull. A single particle beam shot lanced through the brute and interrupted his next blow to Elite, the elite seizing an opportunity of his own turned around faster then humanly possible and triumphantly sliced the top off his skull off.

"Arbiter are you down there? What are you doing" the puzzled Elite called down from the walkway. "The surviving council members informed me of your unlikely alliance," he continued.

Casually leaping off the walkway he flawlessly landed much like the brutes, unto the control panel's platform

"Yes, friend, it is I" the Arbiter replied. "What word do you bring of the outside?"

"You and you're new found allies must join us in battle, it won't be long before the brutes take back this control room and activate halo"

"Halo cannot be activated from here anymore. We need an Artifact known as the Ark. The Oracle-" the Arbiter paused and corrected himself, "-the Monitor has saved its location into the Scarab."

"Then we must protect your Scarab from harm in that case!" The special ops commander declared. Come with me and we will drive them back to their tribes on Braxis!" The Monitor floated by at that moment returning from his duties.

"Here, Here" the elites roared in agreement."

The elite in white armor jumped on the platform orbiting the three levels on a reckless impulse, and then quickly while the window of opportunity was still open, leaped unto the walkway.

"Come forth brethren, there are still brutes to be slain." He called down to the others

They all followed his actions and jumped unto the orbiting platform with some quick internal calculations and a running start. Johnson nearly did the same thing, and then remembering his humanity, he hitched a ride all the way to the walkway with the monitor who had nothing to monitor anymore.

Without any second thought or instructions they all retraced their steps through the facility at a brisk pace.

They came to the previously locked entrance to the facility; it was now an open and flaming cavern due to Johnson's handy work.

They saw a gaggle of assorted high-ranking elites guarding the entrance and it was clear where their steady stream of elites for

their previous endeavor had come from.

Below them they could see a huge battle taking place.

The robust elite forces were in mostly scattered into small squads around the perimeter of the structure firing away with the plasma rifles and maneuvering around in deliberate circles and laying down fields of fire as were a small army of grunts being herded around by their Sanghelli officers. Around them was a fairly stereotypical covenant base with some weapons cache's some more energy pylons, defense turrets firing staggering volumes of fire into infantry forces idiotic enough to fall into range and a sniper box complete with a miniature gravity lift.

Most of the brutes were stemming from a cruiser to the west of the position, hundreds of troops and vehicles were attempting to enter through the canyon across from the facility, this is where the rebel forces concentrated the most fire. Thousands of multi-colored rounds poured into the narrow chasm and instantly burned any life form to death. But the covenant's remnants had many life forms to spare. Huge wraith tanks rolled back and forth across the plains and lobbed tremendous balls of intense heat and energy annihilating groups of brutes and flinging ghosts and specters dozens of feet away dooming all of the riders to be wielded shut in their own burning and melting prison.

The gaggle of warriors exchanged glances as they examined the battlefield below them.

"Do you think you're up to fight one more battle, Sergeant?" said Miranda.

"Try and stop me."

He ran forward unto the scarab docked to the control room's entrance. Ran down eagerly into bridge with the eagerness of a child running down the stairs on Christmas morning and he greedily took control.

3. Harmonic Symphony of Battle

Chapter 3: Harmonic Symphony of Battle

The scarab shook to life with vibrant energy. The joints and swiveling parts of the insect-esque machine suddenly gained strength and stood up straight and erect. The company of elites and Miranda climbed unto the canopy of the great automaton as it took it's first steps unto the battlefield. Enemy Phantoms had managed to get past the sparkling flood of covenant anti-aircraft fire and landed several hundred brutes in the lake right next to the battle field. They infantry guns could not be pointed to face the opposite direction, and there were few guns facing the lakes shore, a fatal mistake caused by haste to protect the Arbiter and his newfound allies from the neo assault on the control room .

"Their trying to mix in with you troops, Praetor!" Cried a distressed Miranda.

"You must do something" the Arbiter stated with his average cool and

collected tone.

The cream armored elite calmly thought his decision over and then suddenly ignited his sword.

"I will go forth and take back the cruiser as I promised" He declared

"Expect to have a fully operational ship soon"

He turned and ran on top of the canopy of the scarab and a waiting Phantom swished him up into the gravity lift and flew off firing a few fiery crimson bolts of plasma down unto the brutes as it passed over the battleground. It disappeared in the horizon, approximately the direction of the Cruiser in the distance.

A huge line of brutes formed a hundred of the beasts wide and ten deep made a mad rush for the heart of the base .The air crackled and lit up as the elites without hesitation nor orders let lose every single weapon in their arsenal at them. Cannons were set up to fire at them from the shore of the lake in an attempt to slow their brisk march to an uneven stagger. Covenant mortar tanks turned their attention to the steadily approaching army of brutes and aimed tremendous blue-white balls of deceptively torrid energy at them. It decimated their numbers, turning many of the places they were marching into blackened craters and scattering many brute's corpses like crumbling and brunt match sticks. They were all eager to meet the symphony of pummeling light hosed from the elites weapons. Hundreds of well aimed Carbine rounds hit them from all directions and angles making many of them flinch, stagger and fall dead under the intense flow of projectiles. Grunts and elites perched high on hovering covenant sniper nests poured down long parading streams of needles down unto the approaching wave of pure muscle mass. They found their targets imbedded themselves into the unlucky bodies of the traitorous apes and detonated in glassy flashes and showers of pink crystalline debris and gore. The charging line of brutes did not cease to spite all of the desperate effort.

They reached the inside of the perimeter and went berserk, charging forth plowing themselves into the nearest soul the could find. Many elites with swords tried stopping them, slicing and lancing the plentiful and brutish Brutes those that indulged to long were swept away in a tide of sinew and muscle mass and crushed to death under the feet of the treacherous primates . They trampled and crushed friendly Jackals and hostile grunts alike. The elites weren't fairing much better either. In hand to hand combat, a brute was king without the aide of graceful swords. From above in the scarab they could see shields flashing and suddenly blinking off. Crowds of brutes sloshed past a pair of hunters ignoring the massacre the twin monsters were making. They surged past them while knee deep in the corpses of their slain brethren in every imaginable position of death and with vital pieces of anatomy torn away from them.

One particular squad perched on a small hill that was within the perimeter was yet to be overrun. The elites and grunts and Hunters fought bravely around the hard earned piece of real estate, going into a defensive formation around a turret firing precisely aimed bulbs of super heated plasma into the brutes who still hadn't gotten cloe enough to fire. It seemed as though all was lost for the brave defenders. This is where they made their stand . They saturated as

many targets as they could until they piled into crisped piles of smoking corpses, but it still wasn't sufficient to stop the insurmountable tide of Brutes. They were getting closer and closer; letting a few slip by here and there. An Elite pitched a hazy blue orb of a grenade at particularly nasty brute. He furiously leaped and bounded forward on all fours like an ape. It was clear if he wasn't stopped soon he would enter their perimeter and blow them all into smithereens. They desperately fired clips of Carbine rounds into him. The continuous green trails of light absorbed into his body and it was clear they weren't slowing him down. Suddenly he was filled with a perpetual hail of tracer rounds and he disappeared in a cloudy mist of his blood.

The drop ship responsible for the kill passed over head, and circled around the battlefield, coming in again madly firing its chain gun into hordes of the alien simians. Peppering their bodies with uranium tipped 70 millimeter projectiles, flaying them and causing mists and fountains of blood to arise from the teething crowd of brutes. Their cries of agony were barely audible over the sweet and triumphant staccato of bullets bursting from their hose on the tip of the mighty Pelican drop ships. More of them; at least a half-dozen had joined, swooping and diving. firing a hell storm of fletchette spikes from their noses. The crowd of brutes thinned pathetically and the ground forces with vengeance empowered by bottomless rage for their fallen and wounded leaped from submission and return fire, giving pursuit of the hulking brute army which was now falling back into the canyon where their army of vehicles still crawled through. The pelican drop ships also racing after the brutes had been led right into range of the enemy wraith tanks and Specters. They all surged toward the canyon opening at full speed and released their Anvil II class missiles. They veered of course to avoid the barrage of wraith mortar fire and the rockets homed in on the tanks and slammed into them, bursting them into fiery, blue, smoking chassis.

White elites jumped from the scarab body, on to the gargantuan limbs, and unto the battlefield and ended countless skirmishes between rebellion and brute forces. Sprinting magnificently across the field and heaving the sword at all enemies that stood in their way. A stupendous performance in the theater of battle. All the stragglers were slaughtered quickly and flawlessly.

Three tanks and a few specters still at the entrance to the canyon lobbed comets of explosive energy and piercing, baby blue, beams of energy from their turrets. Johnson's scarab quickly took aim, powered up its thunderous guns and fired a long extravagant beam of light at full power that leveled the ground at the canyon's entrance and an explosion consumed all of the lingering vehicles that still harassed the rebellion forces with an earth shaking sound that caused the ground to tremble. An extravagant period to the end of a bloody and seemingly relentless battle.

"The monitor is done uploading the Arks location to this scarab's computer." Miranda stated matter of factly.

"Oh no! There must be a mistake, the coordinates are atâ€¦!"

"It's the sol system 'aint it, ma'am", said the sergeant coolly.

"How did you know?"

"Ma'am", he cut in, "you oughta' expect the worst in life, you'll never get disappointed that way" He took out a stub of a cigar to calm his nerves and lit it, and blew a few halos of smoke...

4. The storm approaches

Chapter 4

Three violet phantoms glided cautiously towards the covenant cruiser in the distance. The behemoth of a starship could easily be their salvation, or their annihilation. The alien drop ships held many of the Marine and Rebel survivors from the previous battle.

"Ma'am, we just entered range of the _Profound and Extinguishing light's _turrets and jamming arrays." Announced a pilot over the speakers in the Cabin.

"Steady as she goes, men" Ordered Miranda boldly, trying to make the situation seem much less perilous then it really was.

The suspense was killing her. She, like everyone else aboard had wondered if they praetor elite had been successful in his daring attempt to take an entire cruiser. The endeavor would have needed a little bit of plasma, and a lot of faith. It was still very unclear by the time they reached the docking bays if they had now owned a fully functional warship. They had to fire their way through the docking bays shields, a very bad sign.

Everyone aboard the crew anxiously awaited enemy fire coming from all directions in the docking bay, but none ever came.

The three drop ships let loose all of their battle eager troops into the pier where the docking bay clamp controls were located.

The Arbiter, who had been deployed first, quickly sprinted behind the nearest cover he could find, and to his embarrassment, he could see no hostile life forms anywhere. He did observe however, signs of fierce fighting.

As soon as the others arrived from their transports, he quickly addressed it to them.

"Look there, by the prophets blood there's carcasses everywhere!"

He was correct, it looked as though there was a squad of brutes that had tried to make their last stand there. They had all been hack to death around a single plasma turret, which was also sparking and bleeding strange fluid, it looked as though a brute shot had been thrashed through the protective shield and rendered it useless. They followed the trail of dead bodies in a very anxious and protective fashion, every passing crate and every hall could be housing trouble just waiting to happen. But none had come. They followed still until it lead to the room Sergeant Johnson could remember with agonizing clarity, the bridge.

"Marines, squidly mofos," he addressed, starting to block the entrance to the bridge "what you got here is your standard covenant bridge"

The marines and covenant alike started to groan and sigh

"Here he goes with his crazy stories" complained a marine who had obviously heard a few of his stories to many.

"â€|the same kind that almost killed my lily ass the last time I went into a cruiser!" The sergeant exclaimed.

"A bunch those invisible split chinned bastardsâ€| no offense", he said to the disapproving looks from the elites, "Well, those invisible guys came in there with the swords and nearly slashed me half-way to death. I was cut within an inch of my life! My marines were cut several inches past it!"

"Oh Lord" sighed an impatient marine and he pushed past him. The bridge door parted automatically andâ€|

The Ark was a reliable ship. It could respond to the mental powers of it's user. The sleek vessel made of almost indestructible "forerunner rocks" as some marines called them.

The ship raced around a battalion of enemy covenant ships in a graceful arc narrowly avoiding dozens of lancing particle beams that just barely grazed the great ship. It dived straight down, covering thousands of miles of space at once and was into the mists of the covenant battalion of ships, all of the Ark's batteries fired at once sending out thousands of tiny blue-white lancing beams of light that holed the frigates, cruisers and drop ships thrice over and seconds later, they all exploded in gassy explosions of blue-green dust, and immediately extinguished in the vacuum of space.

The Master Chief inside laughed manically in an uncharacteristic fashion. It was as though the power of the cosmos themselves were in the palms of his hands, but it was even better, it was safely situated in his thoughts. With each kill his rage and his malice and his hunger for power increased.

He spun the ship on it's axis and point the nose of the ship at another battalion of cruisers, at least 21 of them. He searched his own mind and probed deep into the secrets of the ship. He found the main gun of the vessel nestled deep in his thoughts. Just as the targeted ships were about to fire a devastating volley of fire at the earth, he signaled it to unleash and a thick beam of fire and a magma like substance that erupted from the tip of the ship and consumed them, ignited their hulls in a perpetual fire. They slowly dissolved at first, thousands of pieces withered away until their fuel supplies or weapons ordinances were melted and erupted into a massive fire ball. Where once a deadly armada stood, there was only crisped scrap metal and incinerated passengers.

According to the ship's communication log, almost every ship in the fleet was trying to hail him to try and pry some kind of explanation from his hoarse voice. He deleted all of these signals and went back to his euphoric labor.

Hundreds of alien capitol ships now perceiving him as a bonified threat, raced at him at full speed, desperate to take him out so they could continue their bombardment of earth.

The message was as clear to the chief as it would have been had they spelt it out in the stars.

Despite normally being a double life form that could easily communicate with the presently absent AI conjoined by his armor, the chief wasn't one to talk to himself.

"I'm not going to let that happen.

The Ark bolted forward at full speed at the wall of covenant vesselsâ€|

The bridge door slid open to reveal a single white elite, sitting down on the ramp leading to the raised control panel. He was panting heavily and around him were at least fifteen brutes chopped to pieces.

"Holy Shit!" Many of them had yelled in unison.

The elite was covered in blood from head to toe, much of it his own. Where his armor was cracked and shattered, in many places it often oozed blood, He had a long diagonal slash across his chest plate, an ugly mark left by a brute shot blade.

"Youâ€| cameâ€| justâ€| in timeâ€|" he said between vigorous breaths.

"Praetorâ€| what happened to you?" said the Arbiter, finally speaking up.

It was anyone guess how he was still alive after all those wounds and how he could have fought that many people by himself.

"_Say my name, say my name" _he thought in repetition, obviously peeved that people always called him by his rank rather than formal name.

"Wellâ€|" he said, finally deciding after a pause to answer his question, "I killed all the brutes who chose to remain on the ship, there were very few of them".

"How could you have survived?"

"Well, you see, along time ago, I was hit by a volley of near misses from many holy flares, I gained a strange illness that prevented me from being infected by the parasite. Because of the fact that I didn't perish from a failed infection attempt, my body can now naturally repair itself. The parasite passed me up like some over roasted Keryut bird."

"All of that aside, I'm in dire need of a good pilot for this cruiser." he said, suddenly gaining strength and leaping off the ramp unto the ground with his just previously torn leg muscles.

A single golden elite stepped up to the control panel and everyone on board could feel the ship lurch as it lifted itself higher into the atmosphere.

"We shall rendezvous with the _Unbidden Foreman_ on the other side of the ring at a secluded base" he declared in his melodramatic

tone.

"There we can pick up some troops and supplies, we'll need them badly if we plan to stop the prophet's ark."

"You see, the ark is a fail safe system activated during a failed manual attempt, it will contact the other rings at super luminous speed and once ordered to do so, will fire" explained a disembodied, business-like and yet cheery voice.

"Jesus Christ, who keeps letting this guy in?" groaned the sergeant.

"Wait, wait, wait" demanded a marine.

After grabbing everyone attention he queried.

"Now what the fuck is halo?" he continued, obviously oblivious to his present location.

"Oh, how splendid, more questions! I will start from the beginning, 400,000 cycles ago. You see the halo installationsâ€¦"

"This is going to be the longest flight of my life." Johnson sighed, speaking to no one in particular.

He took out a cigar and placed it into his mouth with unsteady hands, then lit it.

His plight in the face of discomfort at the Monitors presence was immeasurably insignificant in comparison to the struggle that took place high above them, away from the furious space battles out side of Halo's atmosphere and inside the mobile city of ****High Charity****. The fierce struggle between the late Pillar of Autumn's AI and the Monument of Sins known as the Grave mind and had come to a close. The Grave mind with his inexplicable, mechanical, dexterity, absorbed computer system after system until there was no where for the AI to hide from his probing tentacles and other extremities. The AI had finally been assimilated in a silent battle in the silent halls of the chaotic city. With her fall came a flood of flowing and rushing data that empowered the King of all Flood. The deity shuddered erratically with pleasure at the new found information that Cortana had been withholding for so long. The embodiment searched wildly through all of the bountiful data. So many planets with so much prosperity. So many opportunities to harvest life forms. He found the coordinates for the home planet of the terrans. A heavenly body with a plentiful well of soon to be corpses, ready to be reaped from their trivial existences and swept into the mighty arms of the flood Overmind. The planet was called Earth.

A/N I promised longer chapters and all that, but this looked like the perfect place to leave off.

By the way, Keryut scrambled around is turkey, the parallels between Johnson's and the white elite's story are all purposeful.

5. Reflections

The Master Chief, still lost in his own thoughts had hardly notice their presence at first, but now it grew alarming and he could not ignore the large covenant force that threateningly but silently loomed in his future. It was inevitable that the Chief would be impeded by them. He searched his mind for a way to view them. He mentally accessed a television of sorts. In his mind, he could see any section of the ship he wanted with great clarity. He saw the prophet of regret in the halls of the ship, surrounded by hundreds of his honor guard. They seemed to be all of the security forces available to him, or at least he hoped so, of the amount he could see, they were already too much to handle.

From what he could tell, they were still on the other side of the 7 mile long ship. In a busy hold of the ship that was teeming with brutes prophets and jackals running every which way carrying out some duty or pretending to do so, so as not to anger the cross prophet . The prophet was gliding about on his personal hovercraft, barking orders arbitrarily. He turned to ten or so brutes directly in front of him, kneeling down unto one knee in his presence.

"Bring me the head of that treacherous demon!", He ordered while literally shaking with rage, "He dares to defile yet another holy artifact of the great ones, and use their own weapons on their loyal disciples!"

The Brutes immediately without a word of question turned and ran to complete the task, fleeing more to escape the prophets wrath than to carry out their mission efficiently. They ran until they reached the nearest exit, and thankfully the door slid open for them before forcing them to slow down and risk upsetting the prophet with the heresy that is a slow work pace. They knew how expendable Truth found all who joined the prophets. They had seen him damn his own blood brother to infestation and ruin, just to ensure a quicker departure to the Ark. The Jiralhanae had hardly even contemplated the possibility of the covenant leaders to be mad men when they joined voluntarily. Nor had the ever bothered to practice their religion. They couldn't care less about the significance of the Great Journey, or even what it is at all. All they knew is that they had great power in their current position, and they liked it.

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Master Chief had seen all this from his own personally ship surveillance system nestles deep in his brain.

ONI had estimated that there could have been as many as 6,000 covenant ships. He realized that if they had even recalled an eighth of that figure, earth would fall in seconds. The sheer volume of ships would merely drive through an over worked defense system and the earth could be incinerated. These were only the most pessimistic figures the chief had ever heard, but in the broken and twisted universe he lived in, practicality and pessimism were one in the same.

A disgusting metallic taste flowed into Master Chief's mouth from the back of his throat. He recognized it as the first signs of fear and stress. A Spartan would never succumb to such emotions, but he felt them immensely. His mind was trained to just brush the feeble emotion away and complete his objective. But lately it was becoming harder and harder to keep it down. The burden of being the sole survivor of Reach and Halo and many other conflicts and continuing his life of violence while others had died took its toll on him. _Others,_ he thought grimly, _who had something to fight for._ He took the time to contemplate.

"_Is the reason I'm still alive to day out of sheer luck?"_

"_Is my life shaped by my actions, or what just happens to happen to me?"_

His task was still clear no matter what the outcome of these questions were, to stop the covenant from destroying earth. All the while he been thinking, he had also been engaged in combat, firing mercilessly at all the covenant ships he could find.

He was so preoccupied he hardly even noticed the squad of Brutes that had accumulated at his door step.

The door slid open and the brutes stepped into the bridge. Any sane being would have looked up at the ceiling to see the enormous source of perpetual blue light on the ceiling that had cast a dim haze over all in the bridge. Any sentient being would have looked around and admired every curvature and arc and symmetrical detail of ancient architecture. Anyone with intelligence and a penchant for knowledge would have never dreamed of harming such a beautiful place. The Brutes opened fire spilling as much plasma, Carbine rounds, and grenades as they could into the room.

The Master Chief was roughly torn away from his thoughts when a Brute shot grenade deflected off a wall and exploded right against his armored breast plate. He ripped himself from his precious console and rolled away from the plasma grenade that had landed roughly where he had just been standing. The air he had been in seconds ago had been heated to unbearable temperatures, but it hadn't harmed any of the machinery in the slightest. He got up and returned desperately returned fire with a Carbine. He could see that he had very little cover and he abandoned any hope of winning a shoot out.

He threw down his Carbine in anger and squeezed terribly hard on the grip of his plasma sword causing the apparatus to instantly form into a crackling and sparking blade. The Brutes threw down their weapons in a similar fashion and charged at the master chief. He set his sights on the lead brute that was bulling towards him with remarkably speed. Feeling the swell of power coiled within his arms and legs, he sprang forth with a leap and a sword thrust that would have even challenged that of the most seasoned elite veterans. The wild beast had charged straight into the blow and was furiously hacked. The upward slash caught him in the chest and he fell back. It was a familiar move to the chief but one that failed to disappoint.

The rest of them were still charging right at him. He was caught in a horrible melee as too many opponents were all rushing at him at once. He side stepped, to avoid a passing Brute and stuck a grenade as he passed. He exploded and damaged his brethren some what. Another brute, without missing a beat, jumped high into the air and attempted to dive head first into the chief. The chief unholstered both of his Sub Machine Guns and fired wildly at the brute in a desperate attempt to slow it down. The brute had missed and landed flat on the ground peppered with bullet holes. The Brute got up into its crouched position despite the hail of bullets impacting its bare skin, and bulled forward at the Spartan still emptying his clip into him. He kept bounding forward attempting to land right on top of the chief and each time falling short and getting more lead poured into him. A single round finally pierced straight through his nose and into his cortex and he fell to his side, dead. Master Chief roughly grabbed a brute at random by the neck that had charged him. The Master Chief lifted his arm and blade high into the air and brought it down on him mercilessly. Over and over again until gore spilled unto the deck and the Brute's leathery skin was cut open, leaving him an unrecognizable heap of flesh. A brute threw himself at the chief and he then ducked underneath him in time for the brute to pass right over his body and give him the chance to attach a grenade to his underside. The brute stopped running and skidded around in time to turn and face the chief. The Chief realized his mistake in horror as the brute bounded toward him and with each stomping step the Brute and the grenade got closer and closer. The brute got too close in fact, knocking the Chief away as the grenade exploded, blowing him clear of the hazy blue radioactive explosion. The Spartan landed in heap in the corner. Dazed and confused with his shields depleted and his muscles limp.

The six brutes still remaining had him cornered and they all ran forward in fury. Just as the first one was about to ascend on the chief, a door two stories above him and across the room opened up and a figure crouched and took aim. A single particle beam shot nailed the Brute through his lower back, piercing the spine. For a few seconds, with a limp lower body, the Brute continued to sprint on his hands and fell hard into the ground on his side. Several other doors on various levels above the chief opened up and fired sniper rounds and particle beams into the Brutes and they all quickly fell to the ground.

Through the doors several dozen elites and marines fell unto the deck on their feet and quickly secured the area.

Sergeant Johnson was amongst the troops and he looked around admiring his and his troop's handy work. He whipped out a cigar, lit it, and then removed it briefly to let out a long whistle as he looked down at the still twitching brute he had disabled early on in the sniping spree.

He stepped over to the Chief still in the corner, situated right between the pane of glass and a bare wall. The chief appeared to be prone, staring at Earth through the thick window. He wasn't moving much but Johnson could see his tremendous shoulders heaving up and down through all of the two tons of armor.

"Chief, Chief", Johnson said with cautious optimism while trying to shake him awake, "Come on, get up you 'aint hurt". He was telling the Chief as much as he was telling himself.

Without saying a word he got up slowly. He could feel the hair line cracks in his ribs with each passing breath and only he could hear the asthmatic whine in his breathing. Within his armor, his weaknesses and fear would never show and this caused people at times to ask unfairly of the chief. He was always willing to carry out his task to start to finish. It was his calling in life. He always knew in his mind that without purpose and devotion in life, there was no point.

By now all of the warriors and gathered around him, eager to question him or to get a good look at what their societies had considered a supreme savior, a demon or a freak.

"What do you ask of me?" were the first self-less words from his mouth.

The Sergeant and Miranda explained as much as they could to the Chief. The chief did not even speak up even once to question the validity of their wild tale, especially surprising when they got to the explanation of how the Elite in White managed to steal an entire cruiser. The sergeant went on to explain how they daringly rescued an army stationed at a besieged covenant base, rendezvous with another cruiser, jumped all the way from Halo and the covenant city ship, and went to earth space territory with the hostile cruisers (who had cleared them both with sufficient passwords) docked with the Ark and fought their way to the control room of the ship in which the all presided.

The Master Chief looked around to take in all that the small army had. There where about 16 elites and 23 marines. All armed with various weapons. Swords, Battle rifles, sniper weapons and heavy ordinance like Fuel Rod Guns and SPNKR Rocket Launchers.

"So chief, you jumped to earth on purpose?" Asked Johnson with a puzzled tone.

"No", he said flatly, "they had already set the jump to the sol system, only when it was completed could I control _my_ ship."

The sergeant and Miranda both exchanged looks at the "My" in that sentence.

They decided to quickly change the subject.

"So Commander, what should be our next course of action?" Sergeant Johnson asked.

She thought carefully for a moment, "I suppose we should try and neutralize this ship, after all, we are ferrying around a small covenant army, if what chief says it true.

Sergeant Johnson begrudgingly got up and shouted,

"Move out marines, we still got a job to do"

Amadeus Amalleee climbed from the wreckage of his Phantom-class drop ship. He was in a crater with heaps of junk and wreckage from the crash amidst the broken bodies of his comrades. Stationed on High Charity in high orbit around Halo, he and the drop ship had just narrowly avoided a dismal fate during the uprising, since all of the brutes had turned on them all at once. His and two other phantoms had managed to escape the base before they were massacred like many of his comrades. All across high charity, reports came in through the comm. system of the downed ship of similar action taking place all across High Charity and Delta Halo. The Sangehelli and the Jiralhanae were each claiming ships, bases and territories for their own.

Amadeus stood up and stretched his legs that had been fatigued during a cramped flight and battered in a rough impact. He walked along the crater, observing the pockets of flaming wreckage strewn around. He was desperately searching for any survivors of the crash. He could find none whatsoever. Of all 16 that had boarded, he had been the only who made it to salvation. He looked around at the pitiful mess that high charity was in. He focused his vision as far as it would strain and saw all of the grand towers and spires broken. The once beautiful skyline looked like jagged teeth, burning and crumbling in the pale moonlight, in the perpetual darkness that had always consumed the mobile capitol of the covenant.

He checked three or four more times in desperation. He finally brought a halt to his mind's delusion that another check would bring his teammates back to life. He gathered eight plasma grenades and two plasma rifles and a plasma sword, and as many rations as he could carry afterwards. He crawled his way out of the crumbling lip of the crater and set off to High Charity.

Amadeus walked about the spoiled junkyard that was the outskirts of the main city. The ground was littered with piles of rusted and worn scrape. Much of it was still new and spewing smoldering chocking, black flames into the sky.

The words of his former commander on halo still echoed through his mind and as his feet wandered, so did his mind. He recalled when he had discovered the Commander on the gondola docked at the Library as around the same time as the Brutes incursion had begun and after the Arbiter had ventured into the installation by himself. He had tagged along with him all across halo until he had stolen a wraith and met with the Arbiter at the control site of the blasphemous ring. He had told him that no matter what, even if the entire Sanghelli resistance is being decimated, Amadeus should make his way to the capitol and try to take it back no matter the cost, even if he is all that remains.

He imagined that many of the Sanghelli were even now, venturing to the objective in vast armies, or small squads or even independently. Taking back the capitol meant control of the defense systems of the city of the night. He had even stationed himself at a base close to the outskirts two days ago just to carry out the will of his people. Putting himself in harm's way unnecessarily had only impeded his efforts. He was now walking along at a snails pace, wandering into the general direction of the flashing lights he knew was firing plasma and the burning city. For the first time, he thought of the well fare of his family. He wondered if his mother and father and

little brother were all right. He remembered how much he had disappointed them by going off to war against the humans. His father had always warned him that the perilous nature of the covenant military would one day seal his fate; such talk was said in private to avoid the accusation of heresy. Amadeus had ran off to join the military on his own accord and left them all on bad terms. It was so ironic that he now worried about them, since they should have been safe inside of the city and he was thrust violently into the theater of battle.

The city seemed so untouchable, it was perhaps untouchable for the human forces, but few would have considered the results of a rebellion. His visions of his family crushed under the maniacal wheels of their own war machine filled him with grief and he began to feel what he recognized as the beginnings of worry. No matter how much he tried to put himself at peace, the thought of his friends and family's demise gripped him mercilessly. He could not stop and weep, he remembered an old story that his mother had told him when was young, about a man who had seen his loved ones die and had been so upset he never moved on. He sat still for the rest of his life and turned to stone. He understood the message now; he must move on and proceed to his objective. _Besides, they are most likely at a shelter, perhaps the Brutes would take civilian prisoners if they were found? The forces protecting my home district are very robust; perhaps they are still fighting back?_

These thoughts all contemplated over and over in his mind all at once had managed to steady his emotions and chased all the doubt about his family's well being from his mind.

"_I can't wait to get home",_ the young elite thought to himself, moving at a steadily rising pace, until he was at a fast walk, "_I can't wait to have a good meal of Kyrut bird and get reinvigorated, I can protect them, I can keep them all safe, then I will show them all my worthiness when I single handedly TAKE BACK THE CITY OF HIGH CHARITY!"_

All the while, he failed to recognize the phantom drop ship that was just behind him, hovering several dozen feet above him in the air, it moved closer and closer until it was nearly just above his head. He stopped dead in his tracks, and for a brief moment the 77 ton ship and the elite stood still as cadavers, and then suddenly, without ever looking back at the ship, ran as fast and as hard as he could. The phantom's turrets sprang to life and rained down plasma everywhere, just barely missing him and heated the rugged ground beneath him. He danced along the ground as the plasma incinerated the scrapes of metal everywhere and finally he hid within the wreckage of a wraith. His shields were nearly depleted and he couldn't risk returning fire before they recharged. The drop ship was still searching about for him, when out of no where, a rocket surged forth and slammed right against the side of the ship, fragmenting bits of its hull and destroying a turret. The transport rose higher into the air and swiveled around in circles and drove back and forth in confusion, searching for the source of the rocket with it's advanced array of sensors. Just then another flaming rocket shot across the night sky and hit it's engines, the brute controlled phantom limped away for a few more yards and eventually fell to the ground and shattered apart in a brilliant, blue explosion.

A few hundred yards away, from his hiding spot Amadeus could here

cheers coming from the culprit, a single blue elite with a rocket launcher held in one hand and over his shoulder. He immediately leapt from behind the damaged wraith and crawled on top of the ruined tank.

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Amadeus doubted this story, but decided not to speak up about it.

"Splendid."

"Your one of those special ops fellows are you not? I would guess that means you're headed to the High Prophet's Abode." the other elite guessed, gesturing a thumb towards the capitol.

The special ops elite nodded and started off in his original direction again.

The other, more annoying elite that was beginning to get on his nerves caught up to him.

"You know", he started, while still walking beside him, "I don't see how you got into the special forces after seeing that little maneuver with the drop ship."

"I just had my head in the clouds, that's all." Amadeus replied sadly thinking of his home again.

"More like your head up your ass" Salkarise exclaimed, and laughed his shrilly laugh again.

"I'm just kidding."

He laughed along with him; he realized if he had to except his help until they reached the High Abode, Amadeus would have to learn to do that on demandâ€¦

On High Charity, the two elites looked forward at the burning and decaying city of High Charity. They both thought grimly of what might

await them once they arrived, but still unable to stop the mindless rhythm of their feet and the sense of duty that filled them, they continued forward into the direction of the maw of burning flames that was the heart of the covenant empire.

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"Alright, Marines", Shouted the Sergeant with an uncharacteristic sense of fatigue and slumped shoulders, "We still have a job to do"

Many of the men and women of the Marine Corps hadn't gotten much rest in the past three days. Many of them were in a semi-comatose state of alert. One by one they had managed to get up from their Card games, and naps, and managed to get into role call position and groggily got to attention. Many of them still slumped and slouched at the weight of their own shoulders.

"Listen up marines, our most dangerous work is still ahead of us. This ship is still crawling with those big-ass, monkey looking, mother fuckers." He exclaimed in a raised voice, a mere imitation of his old energetic self, he summoned whatever vitality he still possessed in order to raise morale.

"It's your job to wipe 'em all out. Any questions?"

"Sirâ€|yesâ€|sir" A marine said and afterwards let out a wide yawn.

"What is it now, Miles? Still don't know what halo is after seven and half hours of mentoring from the pansy light bulb?" barked the irritated sergeant, with the monitor hovering just over his shoulder.

"Nah man, just wanted to know how many monkeys there are in this ship."

"We don't know, but their might be hundreds based off the Chief's account"

Most of the marines exchanged worried looks at this and murmured anxiously.

"Anymore questions?" the Sergeant sighed.

Not daring to give their sleepy minds time to contemplate, Johnson immediately ordered them to move out.

Most of the elites on the bridge were eating rations or practicing their sword play and upon seeing their human allies getting geared up to go, their commander immediately ordered them to beat feat as well.

"Go forth men, don't let the humans shed first blood!" the Special Ops Elite declared, knowing just the words to inspire his troops.

They all ran forth and exited the bridge excitedly. The Special Ops was all but fueled by the zealous appeal of glory in battle. With much of the covenant dogma eradicated from his troop's minds, The Spec Ops Commander wondered just how long the tactic could still last. He knew well in his mind that battle is more likely to lead to death then merit them into the archives of history so he decided to put a little more truth into the usual speech they received.

"Your quite likely to die in this mission, but know this, your death is for a greater good, not for the fallacious alliance of the covenant, but the well being of the universe we once terrorized. Repay your debt, and your deaths will truly have honor." The White Elite cried with a clenched fist in the air.

He turned and murmured to the Arbiter. "This mission is likely to fail, we must have a back up plan of our own, and we can't hope to neutralize this Forerunner ship"

The Arbiter nodded his agreement, "As for now, we must follow the humans. We must be there or they will grow suspicious of our alliance, as soon as their plan fails, we shall be there to help them withdraw."

"Agreed"

They both ignited swords and ran out of the bridge to join the others.

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The Arbiter and the elite in white armor came to a halt when they saw the rest of their task force gathered at a ledge and looking down unto the floor below them. They could see a few jackals, lazily walking back and forth, patrolling along without a care in the world. There were no brutes or drones that they could see, but drones could be easily concealed. Many of the human and elite snipers took up position around the lip of the floor they stood on; they crouched, took aim with their particle beams or S2's and fired a volley at the heads of as many enemies as they could. It devastated the security forces below; half of them were dead before they even realized it.

The rest of the human and elite forces eagerly jumped off the ledge and landed with knees slightly bent, and preceded forth, firing forward with submachine guns or plasma rifles blaring out death at the helpless jackals. A golden elite charge into a roman line formation of jackals, blindly swinging his sword and slicing their delicate bodies to pieces and slashing straight through their shields. The remaining jackals in the room tried to form a defense of position. They were quickly outflanked and attacked from all angles with all manners of weapons as elites and humans slammed their weapons like clubs into the fragile bones of the jackals.

Suddenly, dozens of drones seemed to pour out of every corner of the room, they ignored the attackers on the ground and flew straight to the snipers in order to harass them with fire.

More reinforcements had come to destroy the human-rebellion taskforce. Packs of brutes surrounded by jackals streamed from every door in the room. One elite had charged forward firing dual rifles killing several jackals around him with ease as they staggered and fell around him. The Elite quickly recalled his sword and charged forward at Brute, he stood his ground firing his brute shot in reply, the grenades sparked against his shields; the elite got in range and

whipped the sword across the Brute's torso with a fierce, diagonal slash. He unholstered both his plasma rifles, and hopped on top of a wraith tank, and took up firing position there. He took fire from all directions and died in a barrage of plasma pistol fire from a few nearby jackals. A former elite member of the high council picked up a brute shot and began firing wave after punishing wave of grenades at a group of brutes and jackals in a corner, most of the jackals had died off in a satisfying manner. Their shields flaring off and their light bodies flying through the air. He held down the trigger and continued firing madly until the all fell dead.

An ODSST armed with dual magnum pistols, fired at a brute that had been charging right for him, after a rapid burst of sustained fire, the Brute fell over dead just before impact. He sighed in relief and reloaded, firing at a passing brute charging at something else just out of vision. The brute went down in a hail of bullets. The Helljumper started to reload again, but was tackled to the ground and torn in half by a Brute's bare hands.

A brute climbed on top of a dormant wraith tank and leaped toward Sergeant Johnson, the human fired off a round from his Sniper Rifle just in time, drilling straight through the Brute's rib cage and spine, nailing him in mid-air. The Brute tossed his own lifeless body to the ground through the inertia of his jump. The Sergeant had just polished off his 9th kill with his sniper rifle. He looked around and saw that their alliance forces were already badly outnumbered.

"Alright Marines, put your tails between your legs and get the fuck outta here! Double-time"

The Marines and Elites fired their way out of the room, saturating as much space as they could with projectiles and plasma. They all retreated up a ramp, backwards still firing and the snipers on the top level of the chamber happily followed as they retreated to the bridge door. Some brute shot grenades were still deflecting into the room and they all hurriedly surged through the door, and prayed for it to close automatically and stop the wave of ballistic grenades.

"Okay, okay, new plan" the sergeant said between his panting breaths.

The Monitor approached the group of tired and breathless warriors. Master Chief, Miranda and the Monitor had all stayed behind.

"I ran several hundred thousand scans of the ship while you were gone," 343 guilty spark stated in his cheery tone, "there are over 10,967.5 enemy units in this vessel" he couldn't have sounded happier.

"No kidding, tinker bell", the Sergeant was too tired to get properly angry, "If we can't neutralize the ship with all those enemy monkeys, then we are finished here."

"If we can't neutralize the ship", the Arbiter began, "we must make sure there are no rings left to be fired"

"I don't follow"

"We need to navigate our way to the Halo installations, and destroy them with the Ark's weaponry." Miranda chimed in.

"In that case, we should get as many of those bastards as possible to follow us. Earth is first priority" the sergeant declared stoutly.

"No, the entire galaxy is at stake here, but as for leading them away earth, we are way ahead of you"

She opened up a comm. line with the Lord Hood, who was in charge of the Earth's defenses.

"Admiral Hood, we'll need all the ships you can spare, to escort us to these coordinates."

"Incase you haven't noticed ma'am, we're stretched thin, they outnumber us 20 to 1, there are no surplus ships."

"Please sir, you must accept some volunteers for this mission"

"What if we said we could get half the Covenant Armada to follow us light years away from earth?" The Arbiter promised.

The Admirals eyes lit up at that, "We have a small task force that can service your needs"

Thirteen UNSC battleships had over heard and had already joined them, so had about twice that number of rebellion cruisers, and frigates.

"Gods speed, Keyes" Lord Hood wished.

The ship's engines roared to life and the ark flung itself into the next, approaching 3 waves of covenant ships. There were at least six thousand of them filling up the void in space. They couldn't fire for fear of destroying the activator of Halo and their prophet, so they split into two halves, 3000 ships went on to attack the earth, the other half turned and followed the Ark and it's flotilla as it jumped through slip space.

On High Charity, the two elites, Salkarise and Amadeus gazed forward at the burning and decaying city of High Charity. They both thought grimly of what might await them once they arrived, but still unable to stop the mindless rhythm of their feet and the sense of duty that filled them, they continued forward into the direction of the maw of burning flames that was the heart of the covenant empire.

7. Boiling Point

Chapter 7: Boiling Point

Amadeus and his newfound friend had finally made it into the interior of the City. They had passed through the city gate that had been blown off its hinges by mortar fire. As they passed, they examined the plasma scoring that was evident through out the outer wall of the

city. There were glaring contusions caused by needles and blackened rings caused by plasma weapons. As they passed through the gate they stepped on to the main road. Amadeus looked about and tried his best to remember the location of his home. It was very difficult, as the city was in quite a different state then he had remembered, for the city was in ruin. There were still rows upon rows homes that were still on fire and collapsing into the ground, there were piles of scrap congregating into the once smooth and polished roads made of an alien metal alloy.

"I need to go back to my home before we do anything else first. This district was my old stomping ground" Amadeus gestured to the ruined structures around him. He pointed in a direction and they set off and ran into the cold, night, air, as the two to three story, domed, buildings rushed past them.

After half an hour of navigating the broken and cracked streets, they came to a once prosperous urban neighborhood where there were signs of intense fighting that had taken place previously. There were Drones, Brutes, Grunts, Elites, and even a single Hunter's corpses strewn in various locations and positions of pure agony. Several elites and grunts and a single hunter still guarded the motel-sized buildings that had grown derelict and shattered. This location was quite familiar to Amadeus, and he quickly located his own home and passing through two silent elite sentries he alone walked through the entrance.

He looked up at the large domed ceiling, to see a huge hole shattered into the crystalline roof of his home, spilling debris across the floor, and releasing pale moonlight into the dimly lit home. He could tell it couldn't have been made by anything other than a scarab. He could see that there was also a resulting hole scorched into the floor covered with elegant tiles that now had sharp and jagged piles of trash scattered across it.

"Hello?" he cried into the silent walls and halls of the house. He looked about for signs of life.

Before him rested a flight of stairs, he cautiously scaled them, entering the second story. He could see that before the house had been demolished, his family had prepared some sort of celebration for his homecoming. He looked about anxiously; now growing fearful of the conclusion his mind was coming to. His knowledge of military procedure led him to the same path every time he evaluated the fate of his parents. He could not accept that conclusion. He called again, over and over, growing more and more sick. His head was spinning; he didn't want to accept reality. He saw someone in the corner of his eye, his younger brother, in a horrifying position of death, with limbs out stretched and his neck bent at an impossible angle. His eyes watered with tears, as he looked upon him, still unable to perceive what was lying before him. Without even thinking he ran towards him and crouched down. He scooped his head into his hands, and he saw that cradled in one of his younger brother's lifeless hands a box that had apparently been a present, a present meant for him upon his return. He regretted all the times he had been so cruel and sadistic to him, when all he wanted was his respect. His stomach twisted at the thought of him dying with the belief that he had hated him. He couldn't help but feel upset at the thought of him believing that he had hated him, when he genuinely loved his brother. He again reminded himself of the story his mother had taught him about the man

who had refused to move whilst morning and turned into stone. He now saw no fault in remaining motionless in grief, for he truly wished that he could be a mineral devoid of all emotions, so that he might be freed of his tormenting pain.

He tore himself away from the limp body of his fallen brother, and ran hysterically to find his parents, in his mind he knew they had to be gone, but his optimism would not allow him to acknowledge it, the incautious feeling of optimism would betray him. Amadeus ran from room to room, shouting desperately for his mother and father. He searched until he found nowhere else but his parent's luxurious room. He still desperately debated whether or not to enter, and yet he still opened the door without hesitation. Upon entering he noticed the polished floor was slick with purple blood, leading to the body of his father, with a craterous wound in his chest, caused by a grenade from a brute shot. He could barely contain the hysterical revulsion that dwelled within him, causing a burning, cancerous sensation to shoot through his lower belly. He saw the body of his caring mother, strewn across the floor, in his horror; he realized the brutes had collected most of the meat from his mother's carcass for consumption.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!" He shrieked desperately.

His mandibles trembled his cold fury as his mind raced to understand what his eyes looked upon. His fist clenched causing blood to dribble from the palms of his hands, for his clawed digits had pierced his gauntleted hands. He threw himself into ferocious punch that connected with the wall beside him. The plasma resistant metal crumpled under the force of the blow. He had remembered the day he had graduated from the Covenant Military Academy. The prophet of Truth had addressed them all at the ceremony that took place that day, he had promised them that the covenant would always fight to keep their loved ones out of peril's path. He felt an intense wave of anger at the tyrannical sadist's meaningless words. He himself might have ordered the raid on this district of helpless civilians, the brutal tyrant had no allegiance to his own people he so carelessly disposed of.

Amongst his thoughts, he heard the sounds of plasma fire from outside of the house. Looking through a window, he could see that there were several of the horrible offending creatures that surely didn't merit the name "brute" trying to kill more of his people.

He turned his head slowly, still shaking with blind rage, and smashed down on the machine that had somehow drifted into his hand, it ignited into a four and a half foot, double-pronged melee tool, perfect for exacting revenge on a personal level, he had thought to himself.

Without even the slightest glimmer of apprehension, he bashed straight through the window and landed amongst 20-30 of the offending creatures. They all opened fire instantly and he ran forward blindly ignoring the plasma rounds peppering his shields and without thinking slung his blade all around him in a flying blur of energy hacking them to pieces. Striking again and again until blood sprayed from them and their innards spilled unto the streets. They all backed away cautiously forming a circle around the flailing elite. He picked the first Brute he saw, lining up the target and then executed an astonishing lounge attack. The power coiled in his powerful knees and

ankles sprang forth and he surged at the brute with the speed and power of a locomotive. As he impacted, the sword was thrust straight through his gut, killing him painfully. The brutes scattered about in fear. He followed still desperately trying to achieve more kills. But some friendly ghosts that had entered the battlefield quickly mowed down all the simians in a few short seconds. He looked about still brimming with rage and covered in blood and gore. He searched for more targets to lounge and gouge at. Behind him, a convoy of vehicles pulled up on the street. They were several dozen ghosts escorting eight creeps and sixteen specters and three wraiths. The guardians of the city block looked relieved at the sight of the cavalry. They rushed forth and intermingled with the newly arrived rebellion forces. Apprehensively, the elite that had journeyed with Amadeus approached him, still staring into space with his energy sword still lit.

"Did you realizeâ€¦ I mean that wasâ€¦ THAT WAS AMAZING!"

Amadeus turned and looked at him with emptiness in his eyes.

"Imparablee, my family's been murdered."

Stunned, he had no idea what to say but luckily at that moment an elite walked up to the odd pair and inquired them. He had attained the rank of praetor of defenses, made obvious by his formal armor with a great crested headdress. His armor looked impossibly clean and primed for it's environment, since it was such a dismal and scared place. Everything about him seemed to ooze elegance and refinement.

"I say, that was a remarkable maneuver with those apes. Come and join the convoy, it'll be a great opportunity to strike back at thoseâ€¦ beasts that have surely wronged you, judging by thatâ€¦ strong reaction you had upon seeing them." He said with a grandiose tone.

A Creep pulled up next to them. A particularly eager driver turned to them and casually made them an offer. "Hop unto the bandwagon, if you really want to make them pay, get in the gunner seat. The division that passed through here about 20 hours ago killed almost everybody. We can still catch up to them if we make haste."

"No", said the Praetor Elite speaking up, "I think these special ops troops can hitch a ride with us in the tactical command vehicles." He motioned to the pair and the troops that had previously guarding the neighborhood.

"Ah shucks", replied the driver, "You just want the added protection".

"Come now, follow me." The praetor elite ordered, ignoring the disgruntled driver completely.

The three of them with the Praetor in the lead, walked briskly to the back of the convoy, to where the wraiths and several of the extremely large tactical command vehicles were parked. The TCV's were enormous, narrow, boxy hovercrafts that could easily house sixty elites or so. They were armed with either silos with pods of covenant ballistic missile weaponry, or deadly looking mortar launchers positioned on their roofs. This particular convoy had the pleasure of having three

of them.

Congregating around the TCV's where high ranking gold, white, and silver elites.

"I'd like you to introduce you men to the command staff, this is Master Chopinallee", he said gesturing to an elite with a headdress much like his own, "...this is Master Ludwaganvanee, this is Master Mastraabatamee, and this is Master Cardellemomee. We call him Master Card for short. By the way, I'm Defense Master Sibelius Grakulamee."

"Can you boys drive?"

They exchanged glances, and then shook their heads. No.

"Hmmm, operate the turret then, shall you?"

Without another word they climbed on top of the vehicle. Amadeus, hopped into a plasma turret, his companion, Salkarise, hooked himself into a console that operated the mortar weapon.

"Heavy weaponry, just the way I like 'em." He remarked.

The engines of the convoy's vehicles roared to life in unison and the 50 to 60 ghosts and the other vehicles filled to the brim with troops set off slowly down the main road. Hundreds of grunts, elites, and hunters that couldn't fit in the allotted vehicles as passengers, followed on foot.

They set off for the Prophet's Spire, the heart of the covenant society, at the other side of the city; ready to face what may be their ruin.

"Exiting slip-space tunnel now, ma'am." Growled an elite technician at the helm of some strange forerunner console.

"Were in orbit above installation 006. Wow, there's a whole cluster of rings!"

He was correct, they're four rings all in orbit around on planet, one of them had the same diameter as the planet Jupiter, another was only as large as covenant cruiser.

"Good work," Miranda said dryly, and then added, "Is the covenant fleet still following us?"

"I'm sorry, but yes, they are still in pursuit."

"Good", she said to the bewilderment of the elite.

"Think about an energy shield to envelope both us, and the rest of our fleet and by think of it, I mean make it happen"

"Ma'am, there's a powerful shields generated individually on each ring, our weapons however powerful cannot go around it, however solid objects moving at less then super sonic rate could conceivably bypass them.

That means either tactical nukes or a ground insertion. She thought

to herself.

She turned to everyone else on the bridge and said, "Get the Command Center ready to repel hostile forces.

Someone amongst the crowd of VIP that surrounded her shouted, "The Aquarius and The unbidden foreman, are providing troops and supplies to our aide!"

The sliding door to the main passage way opened and four single file lines of ODSF troopers a hundred men deep gradually flowed through the entrance. Behind them several technicians and other crewmembers of several UNSC ships using behemoth, mechs to load crates of ammo and rations and several other types of vital cargo on to the deck.

Right after them, an equal number of grunts carrying various weapons and ready to set up turrets waddled through. Fifty elites of various ranks marched through in tow and most surprisingly several covenant ghosts.

Miranda, Johnson, John, the Arbiter, and the white elite all walked down the steps leading to bridge and trotted halfway across the room until they met the joint commanders of the reinforcements. One of them was an Ultra-elite, he was very tall and broad for an elite, and he spoke in a bellowing voice, even around superiors. As he passed, troops made way for his wide girth, his figure seemed to impose on all of those that he passed, diminishing his own troops in stature. The other was an ODSF, his helmet rested beneath his arm. He was an American of medium build, in his late twenties, with piercing blue eyes. Across his face were some light scars here and there.

"Hello," he said simply, in his gruff voice, "I'm Major Eisley, normally I'm an air raid specialist, you may remember from a particular operation. But since we were in desperation" he let himself trail off.

"I'm Special Ops Commander, Zeyga Zallaardis, there is no time for formalities, we must establish, a defense perimeter, I suggest the platform at this end of the room, it must be a kilometer wide! I would say about two meters high, it should do nicely."

"Mistah Super Sega Aldaris", Sergeant addressed, improvising his name, "you don't really expect us to hold out for more than ten minutes, there's more than ten times more of 'em, and of equal 'o greata' fighting ability."

"Sergeant, they told me not to tell you bullshit. They don't expect us to last long, once we're all "subdued", they will send in more and more men to die."

"Hold on now," Zeyga ordered, "with my mad, leet, defensive skills, we aren't perishing. Don't expect me to consider a single man or elite expendable."

They all started to speak up at once, arguing over what their course of action should be.

"Enough!" yelled the white elite. After everyone had settled down he continued in a much softer voice, "the Arbiter has a plan."

"The Master Chief and I shall go down unto the Halo installation, and shut off the shield systems on all of the rings. As a scholar, I studied the ring's shield system meticulously. I will require, equipment, men, and engineers. The mission would be risky, I have no reason left to live, but I could see why some would not risk it, I would accept volunteers with open arms."

"I am against it, it would deprive our own defenses of aid, and we need everyone we can get to stop the key to the halos to fall into the hand of that liar, Truth." Bellowed Zeyga.

The white elite generously stepped forth and supported the Arbiter, "That's the only way we can commence bombardment, anything else is futile. I'll call in a Phantom to go through that air lock and give you a ride, inside should be all the crew and equipment you'll need. You'll have one of my finest squads of special operations elites accompany you."

"Thank you, Praetor."

"And should you disappoint me, I will take your head myself, friend."

8. Bandwagon Banishment

The large convoy barreled down the wide, gray, street at a methodical pace. Through the tactical information surging through his turrets console Amadeus was given all the information he would ever need about their situation. This was only a small portion of an army that was heading towards the Prophet's Spire, there were two other divisions, one containing mainly infantry, one containing mostly vehicles, and a third one, theirs contained the most of the leadership staff, and mix of infantry and vehicles.

Through the static of the COM system, he heard Sibelius shout orders over the roar of his TCV's engines. "_We shall rendezvous with the infantry at the south road! Crush all resistance in our path_!"

As the passed through a narrow street, the familiar staccato of Carbine fire and Plasma filled the air. The convoy was taking heavy fire from both sides of the street, killing a few men who were traveling on foot. The convoy's defenders pounded buildings along both sides in powerful praise of their fallen, firing mortars until buildings collapsed into ashes. Many of the specters stopped for a moment and retaliated with their pulsing plasma cannons.

Amadeus noted that his own vehicle was beginning to fall victim. Brute shot grenades exploded harmlessly against it's hull and plasma grenades only warmed it's armor and scattered blue dust harmlessly. He turned the turret to face the direction of the enemy fire, it came from the ground floor of a building, the front of it covered with glass. He could see several brutes manning turrets and hiding behind various objects, every now and then they would pop up to shoot futilely at the convoy's vehicles. He pressed down on the firing stud and saturated the bottom floor of the building with pulsating beams of plasma, skewering the brutes and making them disappear in a spray of blood, moving from target to target, he held down on the firing stud until he was satisfied they were all deceased. The building

began to wobble unsteadily, then collapsed unto itself and exploded, destroying countless other covenant forces still perched in their firing positions.

At the front of the convoy, several dozen elites with plasma rifles bravely scouted forward just in front of the leading Creeps, clearing away all the enemies that rested within their path. They came to a halt when they reached an open courtyard, where an awaiting ambush lied, several carefully hidden turrets shot heavy bolts of plasma at the convoy.

Continue forth! Stop and I will take your head myself! Keep moving through the courtyard, take back your city! Make them pray! All heavy vehicles and special forces stay within the road, do not proceed into the courtyard!

The convoy listened obediently, the ghost zoomed head first in the thick of the small covenant army in the heart of the courtyard, passing through the plasma turrets that graced them. The specters, flew into the fray, their drivers swerving madly, attempting to get their gunners into range while at the same time dodging enemy fire. Many of them were picked off by wraiths at the far end of the open courtyard. The creeps released their vulnerable troops into the thick of battle, then stood away from the thick of battle, providing long range suppressing fire with their powerful bolts of super heated matter.

"Salkarise, those wraiths will be the end of us! We need to destroy them!" Amadeus shouted over the roar of engines and bursts of weaponry.

"With what? My claws? They aren't ready to risk our own wraiths in combat!"

"If we don't the rest of the convoy will be slaughtered!"

"Follow me, I have a plan, it might be a little unorthodox"

"Whatever, man"

He picked himself out of the seat and hopped from the roof of the TCV. He waited until Salkarise did the same, and then they both ran at full sprint even further into the convoy, wraith mortars fell all round them, shattering vehicles and flinging others helplessly into the air or annihilating entire groups of rebel soldiers. Dodging through all the vigorous explosions and cannon fire, they made it to where the wraiths were kept, they both kicked their previous out of their cockpits and took the helms, hoping it wasn't too late. They set off as fast their wraiths could take them, and reached the courtyard. The rebellion convoy was still struggling desperately to take control over it, but they were still making futile attempts to destroy the wraiths with ghosts and creeps.

Amadeus attempted to rally the scattered troops and vehicles over the Wraith's com system.

Stay and fight! Spill into the courtyard, advance, if you stay back and the Mortars will annihilate you!

The wraith bolted forward into the mist of the small army of brutes and jackals, crushing the fragile jackals beneath it's girth, snapping their necks and splattering their flesh. many brutes were flung away in all directions and hurled high into the air dashing to bits against the walls. The troops rallied behind the bold and unknown wraith pilot, killing off stragglers.

The wraith turned to face a trio of enemy wraiths beneath a walkway situated between two, tall buildings he strafed sideways desperately firing as fast as he could, underneath and over the bridge, before the wraiths erupted into blue sparks and flames, they managed to get off three shots. One of them badly aimed, hit the bridge, demolishing it, two others landed right next to Amadeus's wraith tank on either side of him. The tanks was showered in particles from the near misses and shook violently, tormenting the terrified passenger inside. He sighed relief knowing that he had defeated them. He turned the wraith to his left and saw that to his bemusement, there were still three more mortar tanks. They wasted no time firing as many comets of explosive energy as they could, indiscriminately around the battlefield. The three of them were in a neat row, next to a particularly large piece of wreckage.

Salkarise looked in horror as they three wraiths began firing, he looked at the inviting ramp-like piece of wreckage conveniently placed right next to the demolishing trio, and a reckless thought crossed his mind. He cruised into boosting range of the ramp, then triggered the powerful thrusters and flew clear of the ground, and suspended himself into the air right above the three tanks, he opened fire three times in a row, then jumped free of the wraith's cockpit and into the air. The three mortars rounds collided satisfyingly with the first wraith tank in the row, the elite's wraith then landed right on top of the second one, causing a tremendous explosion that destroyed them both, then before he landed on the ground, he took aim during his freefall with his Rocket Launcher, firing at the cockpit of the third wraith, killing the pilot and crippling the craft. He landed into a roll and leapt to his feet triumphantly, dancing with the pride of victory.

The battle ended quickly after the daring maneuvers of the two elites. Afterwards, an out raged Sibelius stormed out of his TCV and walked towards the two elites that were being graciously praised by all the soldiers around them.

He looked at them both with contempt and barely contained outrage. "This is an outrage! Abandoning you posts at our side, you destroyed one of our own wraith tanks, and destroyed all the surrounding tanks that could have been a potential resource!!"

"Praetor, the battle was won, any longer and half the convoy would have been dead!" Amadeus desperately chimed in.

"You idiot, do you not realize all of theseâ€¦ theseâ€¦ this riffraff you jest with is expendable!", he gestured to the grateful troops around him. "You should know this best, you are a special operations major! You are one of the few elites we cannot easily replace! Your own chrome and black armor should tell you that! So what if the expendable half of this miserable army is wasted, as long as the strong half survivesâ€¦ so be it."

Before Amadeus could speak up, Salkarise stepped in to save him. "We

apologize, o' crest helmeted, fearless, bold, manipulating, leader!"

"Please oh please don't send us on a scout mission. We would do anything but that! To us it's worse then execution!"

The conceited praetor thought this over for a moment. "HMMMMMM, I shall send you both on a scouting mission."

"Oh darn, Amadeus," He half-heartedly said, "it looks like we will be scouting, far, far away from the main convoy. Wink-wink"

"You said wink-wink out loud." Amadeus commented.

The praetor ignored this and turned his back on them with arms folded and walked away, laughing to himself. "I sure showed them, those glory hogs."

Salkarise laughed, releasing his reaction at the hilarity that his conversation with the praetor had brought him.

"Hahahaha, did you hear him? What a fuckin' retard!! Now we're miles away from him and that stupid convoy, cause I faked that this a bad punishment!"

"Salkarise, this is a bad punishment", His friend commented, both of them walking along the craggily, broken streets, passing structures that had been blasted apart by heavy weapons and riddled with holes caused by countless hits from minor ones. The sky above them was now a foggy white, possibly caused by high concentrations of ash.

"Oh come on, all we have to do is go some shitty, building, where they think there might be some brutes held up there. You should be able to handle it, after all, you are one of the few elites we cannot easily replace," he mocked Sibelius's arrogant and haughty tone.

He continued, " If he were anymore conceited, he could be a prophet."

This was correct, Amadeus had seen him turn to make snide comments to uncaring elite high council member on countless occasions, during important hearings, most notably, that hearing over the Arbiter's fate. How he got into the commission to decide such important things was beyond him, perhaps it was because of his enormous wealth and friends and family in such high places. He mentioned this to Salkarise.

"Yeah well, I'm just glad we can but a million miles between us and him." he exaggerated.

"Amen to that."

After a few more minutes of small talk, they made it to the ruined building they were supposed to be investigating.

"Well, here's the place," the special operations elite said, "it's

supposed to be some kind of observation tower for the brutes, we must confirm or deny this, then if necessary, we take it back from them for our own."

"We'll take a look, if it's true, we haul ass out of there and report it to the convoy at long distance, if it's not, wellâ€¦ we haul ass away from the convoy."

"Agreed."

They both walked up the cracked stairs leading to the entrance, they peered through the broken doorway, at the sight they saw before them.

Through the broken support beams and the ankle-deep rubble that accumulated on the floor, they saw a firefight erupting between two elites and a group of eight or so brutes. They were firing so vigorously, they threatened to destroy the few remaining support beams that were still intact. The two elites retreated backwards with their while firing plasma rifles and ducked for cover, only after plastering two of their bodies with heat, singe their hair and roasting their flesh, and sticking plasma grenades to two others.

Amadeus and Salkarise realized they were both in great positions to flank the small brutes force. The blue elite got a running start then jumped as high as he could and aimed his Rocket Launcher down, and fired killing two more immediately. Amadeus ran forward with his sword ignited, taunting the opponent whom he knew had to have grown to fear them by now. He circle around him, then hopped forward, and brought the sword down on the head of the Brute, then slashed the other across his chest with a sideways slash. He kicked the brute hard in the face and it fell to the floor gushing profusely with blood.

"What a fool to get so close." He muttered to himself.

The two elites got up from their hiding spots.

"Thanks for the help man! We were so done for!", One of them said graciously and then added, "Why'd the send you guys in?"

Salkarise spoke up, " We got busted for jacking some wraiths, at that battle at the west courtyard about two days ago."

"That was you? We got here for the same reason, the only difference is we were damned fools enough to get caught in the act."

"What's your name, bluey?" His partner, said in a stern voice.

"I'm Salkarise, this is Amadeus."

The elite with the stern voice replied, "This is Alrandgas Numbreleee," he motioned to the other more friendly elite, "Sanghelli Minor number one-one-three-eight and I am Bukil Streregulamee Sanghelli Minor number eleven-nine and my partner here is the one who infracted on the rules, causing both of us to get placed in scouting duty."

"Come-on! Someone had to do something about that prick, Sibelius! He

was ready to waste the entire convoy. These guys are the real heroes, not only did they fail were we succeeded, they saved our asses!"

The other two elites couldn't help but smile at his newbish appreciation at there work. It was the first time Amadeus had smiled after his gruesome encounter, but upon realizing this, became quite miserable again. The terrifying smile faded quickly.

"Let's proceed shall we." He said dryly.

He headed upstairs and the other three followed.

Johnson, Eisley, Zeyga, and the white elite walked along the edge of the platform in the bridge of the ark inspecting the various cannons and other heavy weaponry being set up along it's rim while talking amongst each other. The platform was a solid piece of forerunner concrete, starting at the middle of the room and ending at the end of the room, leaving the half of the floor with the main entrance free of obstacles and it was raised about six and half feet above the normal ground level. The way it was built, every 10 feet or so, there was a ramp leading from the ground, up to the platform, at each of these points, two hunter or an elites with swords, or a squad of marines or ODST's with shotguns was placed. They were designed to stop huge numbers of brutes from storming up those ramps and destroying their perimeter, as ingeniously designed by Field Master Zallaardis.

They barked orders telling some troops to set up barricades and weapon caches here and there. The highest concentration of defenses was around the main controlling console of the ark, in which the coveted key to the halo's was kept.

"Don't you think yer' going a bit ovah ' board with the defense around that control panel?" Inquired Sergeant Johnson.

They all turned and took a long look at it, and they all except Eisley at once said, "No!".

"All manual control over the blasphemous rings has been relieved, except for this particular key. That, is why we fight to protect it. If it gets into the hands of the prophet, all that we fight for is futile. The traitorous wind will sweep through the stars, damning all those worthy of hosting the parasite." Said the white elite in a grandiose tone that was apparently stereotypical of all white elites.

Major Eisley attempted to add in his two cents.

"Look, you can't let your strategy get lost in the peril of the situation. The defense should be a fairly spread, If you put all your defense stacked like that, it'll be gone in a few Wraith Mortars or a few captured Rocket Launchers. I agree that around that area should be highly concentrated, but if we put too much faith in one area of our defenseâ€¦ No, that's risking too much. We cannot do that."

"Idiot primate. Do you not know the severity of the situation? If we lose this place, the galaxy is finished. We need extra defense along the console containing the ring's key!" Zeyga responded with hostility.

"You bone headed zealots don't listen do you? You just wait for an opportunity to speak. Didn't you listen to a single word I said"

The Field Master slowly walked up to him, so their faces were only a foot apart, then cocked his head to side.

"Perhaps we should fight now and get this over with, the idea of the two of us co-existing is lunacy."

"Perhaps." Eisley repeated.

An awkward silence fell upon the group of commanders.

The white elite was the first to speak up.

"Let us all hope the Arbiter and the Master Chief complete their journey soon."

"YOU FUCKING NEWBIE HERETICS!"

Truth was furious.

When fate doesn't appeal to the whims of the irrational tyrant, his madness often drove him to self-destructive tendencies. A good case in precedence would be the decision to withdraw the phantoms when his prophet needed aid the most. Furious that the demon had gotten that close, he set his own designs to help his brother to fire. Then in his insanity, blamed it on his loyal followers. Such habits are hardly broken with experience. His wisdom and experience did nothing, as time went on, the effect only seemed

to compound itself.

The prophet glided forward on his luxurious throne-craft, furiously barking insults and orders at all the troops that lay within his path. His irrationality was increased ten fold by the nature of the situation. The Great Journey he had been so willing to damn his brethren for was so close in his grasp, but was being guarded by his defected troops and the weak yet determined apes. Major Eisley's advice would have served him well at this time, for he was lost in the peril. The Prophet of Truth recklessly came to his decision in through the panic of the events. He contacted all the troops in his possession through his telepathic call, he ordered each and every covenant warrior whether willing or unwilling or whether ready or not, to rush into the bridge of the command ship.

"Hahahahahaha", he laughed manically, "EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM WILL FEEL THE WRATH OF THE TRUTH! I WILL HAVE MY GREAT JOURNEY, I WILL TAKE MY COVETED THRONE INTO THE REALM OF THE GREAT ONES AS I WAS FIT TO DO!"

The room, fell silent, for even all of his escort had left, and his crazed ravings fell upon silent walls and empty space. Truth's actions were far less significant then the fate of a different prophet far, far away in another corner of the galaxy; in the city High Charity.

The corpse of the Prophet of Mercy lay peacefully, in a prone position, perched high on a landing platform. Despite his altitude he was spared the view of the empire he had worked so hard to build, consumed in violence and parasitic infection . It is true that only the dead truly escape the horrors of war. A green, rotting, tentacle slowly slithered it's way from the under side of the landing platform, reaching over it's lip, it raced eagerly across the surface, until reached the fallen Prophet of Mercy. The tentacle plunged itself into the atlas vertebrae in his spine, the tentacle sprang into a tight coil around the corpse. His body convulsed violently, randomly, then suddenly against the dexterous limb, for the prophets muscles found new vitality and his rhythmic heart beat was rekindled. His eyes shot open, glowing a sickly yellow.

The creature still gagging and struggling violently on the floor opened it's mouth as though to speak. His strange gurgles could possibly account for the words, "We're now two corpses, in one vessel."

9. Parasite Overwhelming

It was a bright sunny day in Florida Suburbia. It was summer and the children were playing in the streets, catching up on some reading, and taking up various summer jobs. The sound of children playing and laughing filled the air, as did the smell of grass from moist lawns and the smell of baking bread. The troubles and politics of the Halo universe were far from reach and were only known in the form off foreign conflicts down played by the government-controlled media. A few troubled teens however, could not leave the neighborhood in peace.

A covenant ghost boosted down a road at incredible pace, recklessly swerving into lawns, up rooting small brushes and shattering mailboxes into splinters. However, the rider was not a highly trained interstellar invader, they were merely a few youths joyriding, desperately clinging to the ghost as their intoxicated driver sped up the vehicle they had some how acquired during the preliminary invasion. People dashed back into the homes, retreated from their Barbeques, yard work, and their blissful play.

The neighborhood crab wouldn't have any of this. Old Mrs. Avery who had dealt with these youths before and she came rushing out from her door and into her front porch with a broom threateningly clasped in both hands.

"YOU STUPID BRATS, THIS IS A NEIGHBORHOOD! LOOK AT YOU, LAUGHIN' YOUR SILLY LITTLE HEADS OFF WHEN YOU SHOULD BE HANGING YOUR HEADS IN SHAME! GET OFF YOUR FANCY LITTLE€| eh€| HOTROD RIGHT NOW!" . She shook her fists in fury at them as they passed.

She was shocked when they skidded to a halt right in front of her home. They merely looked her down for a few seconds from the safety of their hovercraft; they then proceeded to fling eggs at her porch.

She stood shocked with anger slowly welling up inside of her.

"THAT. IS. IT!" She yelled, throwing her hands into the air, "I'M CALLING THE COPS ON ALL OF YOU HUDDLUMS--"

Her next words were interrupted however, an Elite Flood Combat form bolted out of her back yard and leapt furiously at her and unto her porch and before it even landed, it swung it's deadly and wispy, spines at her abdomen, messily tearing her in half.

"Oh , son! It's one of those covenants from the See-en-en ! Let's Cheese it!"

The Ghost bolted forward, leaving behind the ruined corpse of Mrs. Avery and the Flood Combat form standing patiently on her porch, gurgling and brooding harmlessly while staring vacantly into space.

Flood Combat forms erupted from both sides of the street as the ghost zoomed past activating its thrusters desperately. They leaped forward as the vehicle passed and landed neatly on the ghost's hull, smothering it, the ghost not being designed to hold that many passengers, swerved violently, spinning out of control and flipping over, it finally skidded into a nearby home and exploded violently in a glassy explosion killing all of it's passengers.

Mr. Rick believed he had seen it all. He was a retired Marine, who had fought tooth and nail against the covenant on a dozen worlds. After he was honorably discharged, he went from odd job to odd job. Now he was just a lonely caretaker at cemetery. The mass grave, honoring many veterans of the UNSC campaign against the covenant. To him, they were just empty reminders of the abysmal fate that earth was presented. His town was far away from any covenant urban forces or even any orbital bombardiers. He knew that in this conflict, no nation would be spared, no geological barriers will be overlooked. In war that defied all the parameters of human conflict, there was no nationality or race the covenant didn't have a beef with. He knew that many often times deluded themselves into believing that only a foreign region would take the fall or that the issue isn't wide spread. He knew that if they have the capacity, they will murder every man woman and child on gods green earth.

He looked upwards into the gloomy gray skies as the freezing rain gushed down from the heavens and he thought of the perilous battles taking place in space above him. The ground turned soft and muddy under the relentless rain. He looked around bored, attempting to find something to busy himself with. He looked at the gate to the cemetery behind him, it had grown rusted and twisted over the long years. He noticed the strange vines that had been growing across the iron bars in the gate. Only, they didn't behave like normal vines that only grew in the absents of sunlight, these were very sturdy and stubborn vines, when ever you pulled them off, more just seems to grow in it's place. They were so strong in fact, they were pulling some of the iron bars of the gate together. He tried prying them off one more time, then as his hands began feeling flustered and sore, he gave up.

As night fell, the freezing rain continued to pour, as he was about to go home, a strange gurgling noise caught his ear, he wondered if they rain was going to cause the corpses to disgustingly rise from their graves again, when he turned and saw the most peculiar sight in all of his years. Dozens of tiny creatures crawled from the surrounding forest in a tight formation. They were like jellyfish with a bloated and swollen whitish-green sack for a head, with thick, veiny, red-orange tentacles protruding from their air filled sacks. He watched in horror and disbelief as the nimble little creatures poured over the iron fence on the opposite side of the graveyard with ease. He watched as they moved with purpose, spreading out and entering the graves of the fallen war heroes. They plunged down into the muddy soil eagerly. He felt like running away, yet curiosity got the better of him. He stared at the little creatures, watching as they all disappeared inside of the graves.

He turned away and gasped for air, realizing he hadn't been breathing all of the while. He wondered if anyone would believe such a story. He wondered just what those tiny little creatures would do with those corpses. He was deeply troubled by the images of the fallen war heroes festering in the bowels of those previously undiscovered animals. He turned around slowly, wondering what he would see and yet at the same time doubting any of that had truly happened. What he saw next terrified him.

Several limbs had slowly risen from their graves; they were gnarled and looked almost like the roots of rotten trees. The limbs moved slowly at first, then they gained more strength, and he saw the corpses shudder violently in their graves, and they all quickly shot to their feet. Their entire bodies were twisted and gnarled and spoiled to tones of white, green and brown. The looked like rotting vegetation, given new life and complex animation. The all slowly gathered into a group, and slowly paraded to the exit, where the still staring Mr. Rick stood.

About three dozen of the horrible monsters stood at the gate. Without warning, the leading form, whipped a strange appendage growing from it's arm across the iron gate, causing it to crumple and fall right off of it's hinges.

He was paralyzed in fear as the strange creatures walk past him and the entrance as the passed within feet of him. He took out an old M6D pistol he kept handy and aimed it at the chest of one of the creatures and squeezed down the trigger. The creature fell over dead and the other beast turned a looked and stared at him vacantly. He backed away slowly, wondering if he was going to die. As he backed into the gate, one of the strange vines wrapped around him and got him into a tight coil, he struggled against it desperately, and fired his pistol in his free hand at many of the strange beasts, and the tentacles soon entrapped that arm as well. The end of one of the many treacherous vines dug itself into the atlas bone of his spines, he immediately fell limp, then suddenly struggled against the vine and it let him be. The coils unwrapped themselves around him, the tentacle knew they would need a fresh corpse that knew tactics and knowledge of human weapons. The others had only managed to infest long deceased corpses, where the host had stopped firing neurons many cycles ago.

Private Mile's foot falls clanked against the metallic floor inside the corridors of the Ark. The entire galaxy as he knew it may depend on the swiftness of his feet, and he knew this well, if he did not reach the bridge in time, the whole defensive operation would fall apart. He had seen the tremendous army of covenant remnants, Truth's host of High Charity, ninth gate of reclamation, marching across bulkheads and squeezing into tight halls and pouring into the ships holds all of them hard wired to get to the bridge, to enact an assault on the control room.

He did not let himself rest as he reached the large hexagonal doors leading into the bridge; he ran head first through the entranceway just in time for the doors to activate themselves and slide open. He felt relieved knowing that he was back in the safety of his allies; there were still many friendly soldiers of a wide variety around him. At the same time, he felt worried that they weren't ready. Most of them seemed to be in the middle of some task, cleaning and reloading weapons, moving supplies across the deck. His eyes darted around vigorously looking for someone important enough to dump his information on. He stood helplessly, giving up, and let out a long yell, "THE BRUTES ARE COMING!"

Hundreds of heads turned in pure shock at the announcement, some of them starting to work furiously, trying their hardest to complete their task. Grunts rushed for cover, scattering and screaming hysterically, some of the troops immediately took up arms and ran to battle stations without orders or restraint.

"THE BRUTES ARE COMING! THE BRUTES ARE COMING! THE FREAKIN' UNIVERSE IS GONE."

He slumped to his knees and started mumbling pathetically. "Game over, man. We've lost. The whole freakin' universe is gone."

The white elite, the sergeant, the Major, and the field commander rushed to his side, and forcefully closed his mouth. He had installed complete and utter panic into the defense force, the meticulously arranged and prepared defenses needed much more fixing now. The sergeant had little patience for the Marine, but only a fool would turn a blind eye to such hysterics in such perilous time.

"Private, take a few deep breaths, calm down, and SHUT THE FUCK UP!" Yelled the Sergeant.

Mile's feverish babbling began to slowly subside and his breath slowed down significantly, then he retold his report in a much more coherent fashion.

"I saw them! thousands and thousands of them! the covenant. They are coming to attack." He stuttered in almost a faint whisper.

The crouched white elite got up from the crazed human's side.

"I see the fear in his eyes, he speaks the truth".

"He could have exaggerated", Zegya, said. "I know many of your kind have a penchant for exaggeration while cowering in fear."

"I'm not taking that chance, I want everyone to battle stations, full

alert" Major Easley said ignoring the blatant insult.

Salkarise and Amadeus moved threw the ramp first with dual rifles ready to fire at anything that moved, but the broken and cracked walls of the observation tower were empty of any beings whatsoever. They carefully scanned every corner of the room and motioned for Bukil and Alrandgas to approach, quietly. Amadeus saw what looked like a whole lot of what looked like observation equipment. There were Beam Rifles and looking instruments scattered and strewn across the floor littered with debris and glass and one Beam Rifle lain on a windowsill looking outward into the city where the moon reflected pale blue light into the room. The Beam Rifle was ensnared with a strange vegetable matter that looked as alien as can be to a race quite at home with other aliens. The long yellowish brown weed grew wormlike and pulsating against the walls and even seemed crush certain objects that were ensnared against and some strands even cracked through the many windows in the circular room to grow up and up into the dome and the very roof. As Amadeus studied it he heard Salkarise cry aloud and heard what sounded like two plasma rifles go off. "Raawwwrrrrr, " He gave an Elite cry that many races of the galaxy had come to fear, "This vile weed snared my leg. This frigged plant needs to learn it's place." He fired off a few more rounds into the vine that had coiled around his ankle until it blackened and disintegrated. They could only look in shock, and didn't know what to make off it.

"Let's just go and report this place was long abandoned and but a billion miles between us and this awful place."

The Sanghelli warriors gathered what equipment they could and They headed down the Hexagonal ramp back to the ground floor where they had first made contact.

"Well this mission was a complete waste", Salkarise complained as they marched down the stairs in single file. They all displayed agreement.

" Now, we must journey back to convoy and give our report in person. They will need us in the oncoming battle." Bukil comment

"Hell no, we are not going back there, we'll transmit that cur to him, then we are to flee from Sibelius and the rest of his convoy." Salkarise demanded.

"I will not be addressed so by one so devoid of Order! I should report you for treason right now! The impudence!" He said in a voice so sharp it was like that crack of a whip.

"Calm down, Mr. regulations, they do not even need us, he said so himself. He has got it against you, too. Who is to say he will not war with all of us when we get back there. He was half hoping we would perish in this endeavor! Get your dogmas out of your thick helmeted head. This mission was meant as a very serious, albeit clumsy, death sentence."

Alrandgas merely rocked back and forth on his heels smiling at the conflict, between the two elites, thoroughly enjoying it.

"Brethren!" Amadeus addressed, "Listen".

Everyone fell silent and Amadeus slowly got to the ground and pressed his auditory organ to the floor, he heard the distinct rumblings of a Brutes speech.

"What are you doing?" Alrandgas complained in his best Toshi Station voice. He lightly nudged him in the head with the tip off his hoof. The other three immediately hushed him to stay quiet.

After a few more minutes of concentration, he suddenly picked himself up and shot to his feet.

"An elite is in trouble down there. He's being interrogated and there's definitely more then one Brute down there."

Alrandgas already had objections. "We aren't cleared to engage the enemy! You're going to get in trouble."

Even Bukil, with regulations on the brain knew that it was of urgency. "Al, you idiot, that's an elite's life down there, orders or not, we have to save him."

"You guys can go ahead and get yourselves into peril if you want. I am out of here. You will certainly get your asses kicked." He turned of his heels and walked daintily across the floor as though it were magma, and tiptoed out of the door."

"Al, YOU COWARD, GET BACK IN HERE!" Bukil shouted at his partner.

"Anyone have a rescue plan?" Amadeus inquired after a little while awkward silence.

"I have one, but it might require some finesse.

The Gravemind looked upon the city of high charity he had raped from the covenant forces. He looked upon them with his eyes, the millions of eyes of his droning minions. His abominable eyes and ears through out Delta Halo and High Charity were all extensions of his cancerous omni-presence all of them sharing his mind and his thoughts. He looked desperately for a way to extend him even further into the cosmos, to extend his euphoric presence across the stars. He looked to the AI he had acquired for answers. He saw within himself an idea within himself that blossomed into realization like a flower. The AI could divide it's being into many subsystems at will. Having acquired this trait from Cortana, he theorized he could do the same. He focused all his will power into doing so, and for a second the flood hordes lost control, but he had achieved his goal. He now had two minds residing in himself. But he pondered what to do with this new talent. He promised himself later that he would experiment with this new power.

The thousands of covenant capitol ships in the sector took up a remarkable portion of space. The threatening battle cruisers all stood still as sentries, anxious for battle yet they dare not unleash the immense power of their weapons of the Ark and it's allies. Instead all of them scrambled hundreds of thousands of fighters from their titanic holds and bays in swarms. They numbered almost a million and all had a single objective. Destroy all those guarding the key. The plethora of ships all had the motivation to destroy the heretics and their disgusting act of touching the holy relics, with

the burning fires of hate and fuel rods, they surged toward the Ark's flotilla of ships that confided within the Ark's shield bubble, a sphere the diameter of the moon and with a thousand times more durability of crackling hot-blue energy.

As the armada of fighters approached towards relative proximity all of the ships launched their own fighters, all of them amounted to fewer than two thousands, though all were well trained and manned by elite's that brought an equal amount of ferocity and intelligence to any field they entered, and grunts who are surprisingly good with heavy weapons systems and humans with unrivaled determination and discipline. This was nothing but a diversion.

The true objective was a few seemingly insignificant drop ships racing madly towards the Halo installation below. Within the drop ships were the two most potent fighters each race had to offer. The Master Chief of weapons of the UNSC navy and the Arbiter of the former covenant. Each had been in the maw of war and thrived where others had perished, succeeded where many armies had failed. A large battalion of Banshees broke off from the swarm and rocketed towards the group of drop ships and fighters. The escort fighters broke off from their own formation and allowed the transports to continue their course. The pilots knew their lives mattered not, only their objective and what was at stake if they failed. The Longswords stood directly in the path of the flight of Banshees, and as the covenant forces opened fire, the Longswords boosted away from the barrage and swept around behind them, pushing their machines to the brink of their limits and firing away madly with their powerful machine guns, peppering several of the crafts until they burst into blue explosions and frantically launched dozens of rockets into the crowd of banshees. Many of the swirling rockets found their targets and exploded some hit by several rockets at once and gave chase to more elusive banshees that swirled and weaved in the darkness of space to avoid them. After recovering from the maneuver the Banshees counter attacked and engaged each of them in dogfights swerving and swooping and diving and fleeing and giving chase, desperately trying to get a good angle to fire upon their opponents.

By this time the space in which they fought seemed only to be small pinpoints of light from the view ports of the Drop ships as they safely descended into the Halo's atmosphere, the Phantoms shields shined as they flared to life and the resistant metals on the Pelicans glowed red in the friction of the atmosphere. They plummeted through the clouds like cannon balls glowing a soft color of orange. Their retro boosters ignited as they descended to the lower atmosphere, and started to touch down carefully in a clearing within a dense jungle, looking remarkably like the jungles of Delta Halo.

Master Chief felt the ship thrash violently and knew that they had been hit by enemy fire. Elites and humans alike had been rattled around inside as they had left their restraints, he noticed many of the Marines were bleeding from their mouths or throwing up, some might have defecated or urinated themselves the Chief noticed and a sickening smell hit him and required his suit to vent them from his helmet. "We're in for some chop, people", the steely, female pilot calmly announced over the speakers. Covenant infantry turrets at all sides of the clearing opened fire and let loose round after round of plasma firing, narrowly missing in some cases, and splashing against the sides in others. The drop ships circled around and around,

returning fire of their own, autocannons and plasma cannons blaring and peppering their targets until they popped under sustained fire and disappeared in a mist of their own blood.

"We're clear enough people, I'm dropping you mothers off, ASAP." All of the transports swooped in low and finally touched down to the ground. Marines jumped enthusiastically from their pelicans, those in phantoms were simply deployed from dozens of feet in the air, and landed expectedly in the mists of combat.

They were the Commanders personal squad; an Elite squad of Elites and Hunters designated 3L-173 when translated into English numbers and letters. Their status among the covenant military was legendary, many of the races conquered by the covenant spoke of them with fear in their primitive tongues around their campfires and the armies of lesser races surrendered to them in droves. Their leader was the white elite's seed himself, a strong confident and arrogant maverick. His ferocity and skill on the battlefield rivaled that of the Arbiter and the Master Chief. His name was simply, Serr. Serr because of his nationality in the Sanghelli race his name lacked the suffixes and surnames that Serr found excessive and silly. Just plain old Serr.

Serr landed into a roll into the soft sand with his Carbine tucked close to his body and belted out a devastating barrage from the muzzle of the projectile shooter into the skull of a brute almost 20 meters away, perched contently in his sit down turret, he screamed in agony and fell limply on to his side. He picked himself up and sprinted across the battlefield that had become alight with thousands of rounds of plasma and bullets and explosive weaponry going off, punctuating the battle and kicking up cloud of dirt fogging screening the air around them. He continued to rush towards the turret he had liberated until a spectre roared past him and he just narrowly evaded it with a graceful back flip, landing into a crouch, he dug himself into the sand and took aim at the specter's gunner as it swerved into a group of his men, and they expertly scattered out of it's path as he was about to fire a few round into the Brutes head one of his Elites lounged into the gunner as it the Specter flew by. He smacked the Brute gunner with his plasma rifle until he became too feeble to get a firm grip on the plasma turret. The Brute could only give a pathetic grown as the elite heaved him out of the gunner seat in a bleeding crumpled mass. The elite took position on the gun, still driven by the enemy soldier and swiveled around, peppering a group of jackals to death with his stinging white hot plasma. The driver became confused and fear stricken at the sudden disappearance of his gunner and the appearance of the Elite and swerved wildly around the battlefield, ferrying an enemy soldier wildly blasting at the side of the clearing owned by the pinned Jackals and Brutes. Still panic stricken, he thought of the snipers positioned on the sheer cliff wall of above the battlefield. He pitched forward and boosted right into a rock wall below a sniper den.

Kegyu took aim with the sniper he had been trained since his childhood to use. He had been bred very deliberately by the Covenant over many generations. Selecting parents with keen vision and good hand-eye coordination and a particularly sly, clever mind. His

training at the hands of the brutal elites had been rigorous and excessive. Those who could not hit 10 targets a minute were sentenced to death by torture. Those who made a sound while running during an exercise were rumored by many of his peers to have been thrown into the depths of an Installation library (the most hated place on halo) never to be seen again, left to wander forever. It would be a lie to say Kegyu didn't harbor a deep hatred for his trainers'; hatred that compounded into racism over several other encounters with Elites. He had lost many of his friends in their exercises and had never known a true family other than the bond formed by the Covenant, a bond which meant nothing now, a bond which had only stood on a knives edge for as long as it had, restraint and thinly applied tolerance had been the only thing keeping them from killing each. _It is good that they chose now to dissolve,_ he thought happily to himself,_ we are far to close to our objective to be stopped. Halo would be activated soon and all of those worthy enough were to be swept across the stars. Nothing they can do now will stop it. Halo will fire and nothing they can do will change that-_ A loud crash interrupted his thoughts. Below he saw the idiotic Brute bellowing for help. He had crashed the nose of the Specter into the sheer wall below him and had an enemy in his gunner spot that was still loudly shooting flickering bolts of plasma, frying fur and reptilian skin into a nauseating fragrance of burnt hair, flesh and ozone.

"HELP ME NOW, YOU GREAT BASTARD HELP ME!11! 11! 11!SHIFT+1!"

It's Minatartarurus again; the world would be a greater place without the bumbling idiot, Kegyu observed to himself.

The idiot yelled for help in his general direction and he ducked down in time to make sure the moron didn't point him out to the Elite. Kegyu crouched in between two large boulders and took aim at the elite, hoping he was well hidden. He squeezed the firing stud inside the grip of the long barreled weapon. A long silvery-purple lance of energy satisfyingly sang it's way out of the muzzle, and he got the tingling sensation every sniper got before his kill. The elite saw the bolt frying through the air before him and grounded himself firmly into the gunners rotary station with wide feet and crouched fast enough to miss the bolt completely, the Jackal was surprised but not for long and fired two more shots vigorously before the weapon over heated The Elite side stepped one round quite professionally and absorbed the other in his shield. He unslung his Battle Rifle in a blur and to Kegyu's horror fired nine rounds at the sniper. The last thing he could remember with cohesion was looking at the elite take aim and then the feeling as though he had been hit by a volley of high speed bowling balls and then rolling around in agony. The rounds tore through him messily and left his shoulder in a stinging mass of shredded meat and his right arm missing at his elbow, and whole torn through his innards. Kegyu hounded in pain and lost his footing. Still living, he involuntarily rolled slowly down the side of the cliff, and got a clear view at the elite that mortally wounded him. The battle was coming to a close and another elite had joined him. He gotten off the turret and stood just above the cockpit, pounding the head of the confused Brute, roaring with laughter. The other Elite joined in and ripped the cockpit open and threw the whining Brute to the sand.

"Please brother, help me!" He pleaded to the Injured Jackal. Kegyu's Particle Beam rifle lay inches away and he was far too weak to reach it.

Kegyu looked him right in the eye as the final deathblow hit him.

Kegyu realized that tears were welling up in his eyes. He had his differences with the Brute, but he had been almost like a father figure to him. After the chain of command had broken up during the rebellion he had become close to Jackal and knew that at times, he could be a good person, sometimes he could be a very funny person to be around.

He could feel the Reaper's breath on his neck and began to feel cold.

Oh well, he thought to himself and smiled,_ Halo will fire and there is nothing they can do about it._

He was absolutely right.

The line of Special Ops Elites and Hell Jumpers charged to meet the remaining mass of covenant at the other end of the clearing. They strafed and dodged incoming fire expertly while firing precise rounds back at the them, flying projectiles darting from dozens of different sources tore and punctured themselves through bones, armor, and equipment at the covenants end of the canyon. The Chief ordered a massive hit from the men with Fuel Rods and SPNKR Rockets to lay down heavy fire. Several rockets whisked away towards their turrets and devastated them; blowing energy stations, weapon pylons and personnel sky-high. More importantly it laid down a smoke screen that proved safety enough for the Master Chief and the Arbiter to lead a massive charge against the last remaining covenant at the end of the clearing and the enemy forces were all killed to the last man with complete and utter efficiency.

Master Chief began to notice something in the soldiers that had been dropped off to fight at his side. They say there are always those soldiers who seem especially gifted and thoughtful, those who are "born to fight". To them it looks as though all of their enemies and allies are moving in mundane and predictable movements that are easily overcome. They aren't particularly stronger or faster than those around them, they just seemed to be touched by something extra. As though fighting was just subconscious, and something else just happened to control their movements. It was obvious that they had been sent on this dangerous mission for a reason. When the flood outbreak as they inevitably do, warriors like them would be needed to withstand their hordes.

The Chief surveyed the remnants of their army and saw that only around a dozen of the two dozen hell jumpers remained, the rest had fallen at the hands of the enemy, but the squad of Hunters and Elites seemed relatively untouched. He made a quick note of it and told the remnants of his men to move out.

-High Charity-

The Brute Commander walked through the basement of the dank and dreary observation post with the strides of a would-be giant and the airy swagger and confidence of an officer at his own decoration ceremony. The other brutes in the room immediately put a pause in their task of interrogating a battered and fatigued elite, lying slumped against the shattered wall made of the processed vegetable matter known to man as "wood". The other six Brutes stood at attention to the commanding officer and his entourage, two other extra-terrestrial simians with rusty and worn looking Brute shots.

"What is the meaning of this unsanctioned interrogation? Why was this initiated without my consent?"

The Brutes looked around in confusion and shifted uneasily. One of them piped up more pathetically than one ever hears a Brute speak.

"B-Butâ€| butâ€| you did say we could interrogate him, milord. Not ten cycles ago!"

Even now, the worse for wear Elite in the corner weakly craned his neck up to look at the Brute Commander in anticipation. The Commander was at a completely loss for words at this and stared at him agape, as if ready to speak. He then did something no Brute had ever done before. His hand darted to his belt and brought out the hilt of an Energy Sword and it crackled to life just as it began its descent into the Brute's Torso, sheering him in half and moving so violently that the holographic image of the Brute Commander fuzzed out of view and was replaced by the resounding and clear image of Special Ops Major, Amadeus and the two shining spheres projecting the fake image of the Brute Commander died and fell to the floor. The two Brutes surrounding Amadeus let loose a fierce volley of Brute shot grenades at targets of their own and their false identities melted away revealing them to be the fugitive rebel Elites, Bukil and Salkarise who each tore away at a Brute with their manic grenade launchers. The Elite in the corner found this to be his opportunity to strike at his own captures and whipped out two concealed Plasma rifles and overloaded them both at point blank range into the skulls of two unsuspecting Brutes. The cool-burn of the plasma fried their brains and the heat traveled through their necks, burning their spinal cords and they slumped to the ground dead or unconscious. The Elite in the once decadent armor of an Honor guard managed to mutter a short thanks and got one last, foggy look at his liberators before falling unconscious himself.

-Joint UNSC and Revenant Forces Command Post #1138. The Ark.

Sergeant Johnson was not easily nerved.

He released the clip of his Battle Rifle and checked for grime or jams or other problems that might complicate things during the defense. Nothing.

It was a nervous and uneasy habit of his that his men could pick up

on from a mile away. It turned out that being given tactical command to a defensive point that would decide the fate of the observable universe is one of Johnson's personal peeves and that the sooner this operation was over, the better. He looked through the scope again as half a mile away the 70-ton bulkhead their forces and welded shut was being pounded on with a monumental amount of force. He took a long gaze at the forces arrayed at that door. 700 UNSC Marines armed to the teeth with Battle Rifles, Shotguns and Sniper Rifles stood at fixed positions behind barricades setup at strategic distances away. Further back on the highest tier off the room and closest to the Ark's control panel were the crack snipers of the ODS divisions. A mass of steady, gunmetal black clad soldiers stood crouched in a perfect formation behind a barricade of ammo boxes and steel plates that matched that of any brigade of soldiers in the Revolutionary war. To get those soldiers, the covenant would have to get through a ring of shotgun wielding Marines and ODS's and sword wielding Elites, they would also need to cross a rather large and steep flight of steps 20 feet high outward from the stairway was a division of Battle Rifle and Carbine wielders within a barricade of their own made from all the crates and steel plates and portable energy shields that could be found. Just in front of them were another ring of marines with Shotguns, Sub-Machine guns and elites with swords and plasma rifles and support weapons like Rocket Launchers, Needlers and Brute shots and thousands of Grunts armed to the teeth with plasma weapons of all types and to top it all off, 36 pairs of hunters with both stream and projectile Fuel Rod Cannons all placed on a peer elevated 6 feet from the ground by supporting struts with short stairways leading from the ground to the pier. All arrayed against the army hell bent on executing them and their loved ones for their own false deities and dogmas. Some fight for the vengeance of those fallen in the past at the hands of the enemy. Some fight for their own redemption, disgusted at their once oppressive and destructive ways and hope to make amends.

All are fighting the good fight.

12. The Heart at Voi

"The major flaw in the UNSC's campaign against the Covenant was the lack of understanding surrounding their motives. What the Covenant wanted from us was very specific, and had they known that the Covenant was an archeological organization (with one hell of a defense budget), I'm sure the war would have turned out much differently. The UNSC's lack of interest in the findings at Coral, Reach, Cort Azure (sic) and in the Halo conflict also showed inexcusable ignorance and these 'Forerunners' had hidden a much greater threat. They would have been shocked to learn that the war would be one day known as 'The Halo wars' and not the 'Covenant-Human war'. Still, the fundamental flaw in the war effort was the failure to see the big picture; instead of understanding why they wanted to do us in, they decided to go into battle with the same "us against them" dogma that has plagued Terran warfare since the beginning." â€œ Unknown UNN Journalist, July 7, 2555

In the dark interior of High Charities highest bastion, in the Prophet's inner sanctum, the Gravemind brooded. In his decrepit chamber, he channeled energies He had not used in hundreds of thousands of years; not since the last conflict in which He deployed his minions. The same aural link that the Entity shared with all the

members of His retched hive would serve him well in His coming task. He spread his consciousness through the galaxy, searching with His feelings. He sees not with eyes, He knows the universe only through a buzzing crackling field of energy, a medium as traversable to him as the ground is to you or I. Finding his intended target took him little effort. Satisfied with the fruits of His search, he ripped apart his inner being, slicing away a part of his consciousness and screamed with agony. A trait he learned from His hapless AI prisoner, Cortana. For a few moments, High Charity shook as though an Earth Quake had struck it.

A swarm of gamma radiation particles soared through the night sky at super-luminal speeds from the interior of High Charity and raced through the skies. In minutes it was out of the star system and traveling further into the fringes of Milky Way.

Into the solar system the wave of radiation traveled, where the Covenant's final blitzkrieg was taking place. Thousands of Covenant cruisers, Assault Carriers and many hundreds of thousands of Seraph fighters and Phantoms speared their way through the defenses about Southern Africa, much to the bewilderment of some 300 Defensive MAC Stations and 750 UNSC capitol ships and untold amount of Covenant Separatist cruisers. . The guardians of earth hurried frantically to reinforce this breach.

The Covenant Armada ignored the thundering volumes of fire and the crippling waves of MAC rounds and Plasma torpedoes bombarding the thick and narrow convoy of Covenant vessels. Hundreds of ships and Space stations stood in huge ranks, firing haphazardly into the enemy's swarming ranks. The shields of the great vessels popped like the frothing bubbles of a surf, beneath them the vessels hull's cracked to pieces and exploded in brilliant blue and orange flames. The atmosphere was showered with glowing globules of slag sprinkling from the shattered ships. Like cars in a traffic jam, the Covenant vessels sluggishly crept into the atmosphere, the end of each capitol ship touching the front of another, all the while absorbing enemy fire. Cascades of nuclear missiles swirled up from terra below and hammered into a great many of them, engulfing entire clusters of them in fires fueled by such power that suns would envy them.

But still a greater number of them would still arrive planet-side with an exceptional show of force. Covenant cruisers would eventually spread to the far sides of planet, destroying UNSC military installations, pulverizing all resistance. Assault carriers would land, spewing forth millions of Brutes, Jackals and hundreds of millions of Drones. In days, the Covenant had thoroughly conquered and occupied the greater whole of humanity and their ground forces. The UNSC headquarters was now a smoldering tower and the leadership had become beheaded. The Covenant Separatists launched a great many warriors as well, thus turning Earth into another one of their worn battlefields. There they contested each other with ferocity, whilst the UNSC fought back with the potency of toothless lion.

None of this matters. The swarm of radioactive particles managed to slip past the tattered remains of the Earth's o-zone layer, and floated invisibly into Lake Victoria, not to far from the main landing site of the Covenant.

There the Covenant worked laboriously. Hundreds of scarabs and a myriad of other digging tools were being unloaded from huge cruisers.

Hundreds of Banshee's circled above, an ominous gesture; while several Phantoms hovered in place above the camp, daring any challengers to come forth. The Brute Commander of the operation; Jyheralhanei was first to step foot on the dusty new Mombassa soil. He looked into the giant crater where Regret's departure had created a slipspace rupture, blasting a wide valley into the ground.

He folded his arms and smiled to himself as the wind created by a thousand machines blew dust around his feet. He looked out to the northeast where the jagged skyline revealed the small city of _Voi_. He thought to himself. _That is where the end of the path lies..._

13. Vitality of the Ark

"It is in fact, I, who should compliment all of you, you, loyal members of the Covenant, you, who have adhered to the most demanding of the Covenant's wishes. I requested your allegiance and you, in turn, without shedding a tear, have relinquished it." The Prophet of Truth gestured with spread arms to his audience, a host made up of thousands of Covenant Loyalists. "All of you who stand before me now have gone through the lengths of love for the Covenant. You have proven yourself worthy of Godhood beyond all reckoning. Soon, you shall have it." Truth declared to the Grand Chamber. He stood on a Balcony 50 feet above his attentive listeners, his crisp voice echoed into the ceilings and walls of the chamber that were hundreds upon hundreds of feet apart. The daunting and yet simple design of the Forerunners gave hallow drama to his stark words. The crowd was overcome by religious conviction at his last, trite piece of flattery. They whooped, hollered, clicked and honked outrageous approval. Truth whisked his lavishly sleeved arms in a gesture of silence. The deafening noise stopped in seconds.

"My address is not pure allure and contentment. I bring you grave word of the Great Journey's progress. Mighty Tartarus has fallen at the hands of the vile Heretics, particularly, the one who dares to still address himself as the Arbiter. The Humans have made fast friends of the fiend and stole the Sacred Icon, that which they had pried from Tartarus' surely, lifeless hands. For only he would have been worthy of activating the sacred rings." Truth lied. He had learned for a fact that only the "reclaimers" could wield the Icon. He discovered a horrible truth about Humanity that fateful day the Arbiter yielded the Monitor and the Heretics head.

Truth paused, and then continued. "They have managed to stall our path to enlightenment, but they have not ceased it. The Covenant has a mere second obstacle to surmount in the coming conflict. Do you tremble? Fear not my brethren; we would easily pass a life age of hurdles to obtain passage to the Great Journey. Do you mourn the passing of your Chieftain? As you shall fear not, like you shall mourn not. Tartarus' assailants shall be met with a dimmer end. Even now, we are setting a most fantastical trap for this now, self-proclaimed 'Arbiter' on one of the sacred rings. Tartarus, having died in noble cause, resides now in warriors' heaven. There is no doubt that when we rule as Gods, he will rule among us.

"The need has arisen for us to use the most precious Ark to activate the sacred rings. Go forth, my righteous brethren, and stay only who is needed to protect me in this chamber. Force the opponents of our

enlightenment to flee in darkness and disarray or slay them all if they do not cast aside. Fly now! Fly as fast as your feet will carry! Allowing the Great Journey to stall any longer then tenderness and duty require is as great a Heresy as any dissensions from the path could ever be!" the icy voice of the Prophet commanded from on high. An uproar of applause rang out through the chamber.

With that, thousands of Brutes stormed out of the chamber in a thick mass with just as many jackals lightly tiptoeing amongst the crowd, trying not to get stomped beneath the broad paws of the zealot Brutes.

They flooded through the giant gates of the chamber while others squeezed themselves through smaller bulkheads and doorways. Buzzing and clicking drones set flight all around. The army, some 10,000 strong snaked its way through every hallway and hold on the ship in a thoroughly disorganized and jumbled fashion. Not at all in Government. They had barely made it half-way through the 7-mile long ship before Private Miles saw their shockingly, swift progress and turned heel and fled, crying his warning of impending defeat.

Now, however, there was considerably less excited panic and more queasy fear. He looked about the colossal control chamber of the Ark. Sergeant Johnson stood next to him looking as confident as ever. _Probably just another skirmish to him_, Miles thought rather grimly. Johnson was bombastic as ever. Telling everyone to shape up, giving his little pep talks. He remembered the few ordeals he'd been through with the man. Crash landing on the Outskirts of New Mombassa, he hadn't been there when a particularly mischievous scarab and rampaged through the bridge he had been commanded to guard. He had, however, been there to tell him to stay strong when he requested an evac. He supposed he had to thank him for that.

With the Master Chief's help, the use of a tank and a trusty rocket launcher, he'd made it through alive. _I'd rather have the chief here_, Miles reflected to himself. He'd broken him out of a modest cell in High Charity, and barely escaped the atrocity there by the skin of his teeth. He was not a survivor amongst Johnson's men, but fell in with a company of rebel Elites who had given him a ride off of the newly minted Hive of the Flood. _If Johnson can stay strong through this thing, then I should do fine_, he told himself. _I've seen worse in the past three days then he has._

He took another look around and wondered just how much better the current situation was. He stood behind a shoulder high wall, made of the ship-grade portable barricades found on nearly every UNSC vessel and a few boxes of ammo, supplies and some portable turrets mounted here and there. Even a few warthogs were added in for some extra defense and firepower.

Next to Miles was the first Gauss turreted warthog he'd ever seen in his life. He'd heard tales of its raw power and precision on the battlefield and felt a sliver safer. The barricade continued for about three hundred feet across, manned by many hundreds of Marines and Elites with every type of weapon imaginable. Behind him were two more barricades, each one shorter then the last and with fewer men behind them. Most of them were support or engineering staff.

Behind all that was, what to him, looked like a tall, stone pyramid of steps; cut in half, with one half glued to a giant indestructible

piece of glass that filled the fourth wall in the chamber. It was so tall in fact, that it almost touched the ceiling that stood hundreds of feet above their heads. On the upper steps of this pyramid were rows of ODST's and Special Ops Elites armed to the teeth with sniper rifles, battle rifles, rocket launchers, Beam rifles and the heaviest chain guns known to man.

At the very top of the pyramid stood a tiny, crystalline room about the size and shape on a telephone booth. An electronic headset made of long cable hung from the ceiling, wrapped around the head of it's current pilot, Commander Keyes. This was the intended target of the attackers. All of this was situated on a pier, half the length of the chamber and just as wide with titanic pillars supporting it ten feet off the ground. At the edge of the pier stood rows of grunts with every type of weapon they could hold (and a few elites of various rank to keep them in line) and Marines. Leading from the ground to the pier were several gaudy ramps that Forerunners preferred to ladders. At all of these ramps stood those massive Hunters and several sword-wielding Elites.

He was snapped out of his assessments when Johnson gave him a light tap on the shoulder

"You okay, Marine? You look like you're buggin' out on me," said the Sergeant. Indeed, the Marine looked quite sickly and pale.

A few of the surrounding Marines tittered at him.

"Oh, well aren't we confident? Nothing could possibly be amiss here." Mile's said cynically at the surrounding men. He stopped, and then continued sternly, "None of you saw what I saw! You don't know just how fucked we are!" The stress of the last 72 hours was finally flowing from him.

Johnson quickly silenced Miles, "Stow it! what are you doing, Private?" he whispered, grabbing him roughly.

Miles looked at him weakly, "I don't know, sir!"

"What?!"

"Well, how do you all stay so calm during this mess! I don't know how everyone else does it." The words were spat out of his mouth before Miles could stop them.

The good Sarge gave him a long look. And to Miles, surprise, he laughed a little. "He-he. There isn't any trick."

"What do you mean?"

Without warning the Sergeant broke into one his favorite poems.

_They said that fear was in the closet _

_He had two, red glowing eyes _

_I threw him in the basement and I chopped him down to size _
Did he do it cause he's fearless?
Did he do it cause he's strong?
I really only did it because I'd have to do it all along
_If you've got a wary kind of job _
And it pushes and it shoves
You can't stall it any longer so die doing what you love
You must steel yourself, and face your duty each day.
Fate, it's coming, so face it your way.
_Spectral rumination, _
Come from desire, come from lust
Do exactly what's expected and do exactly what you must
_Fate 'aint comin' any later _
With his deafened, little ear
Not coming any later, so why should you even fear?
So steel, yourself and face the music in place
'_Fate, it's here so face it in good faith_

"Soâ€¦ you're saying that I should just allow myself to die?" Miles inquired.

"No, no, no! Weren't you listening? And I'm sure as hell not gonna sing again." Johnson wagged a gloved finger at Miles.

Miles raised an eyebrow at him.

"Look, you here already, and you can't leave. Just accept that you're gonna do some fightin' and stop bitchin' about it. And no, you don't have to die. Just do your duty, do what you can and if you gotta, hide behind me. Everything is gonna turn out fine. Or, you'll be too dead to really care either way."

"Surprisingly, that helps, Sarge. Thanks"

"Don't mention it. Seriously, you tell a soul, and I'll kill ya."

The Elite all dressed in white walked along the battlements, surrounded by several Elite Praetors and Councilors in their decadent headdresses, and his personal assistant, Brazinskallamee with his black special ops armor, standing out amongst all the white.

"We must review our defensive plan with these humans. Only then can we achieve true revel in combat." Suggested the White armored Elite. The staff around him nodded in general agreement.

"Gather 'round, Marines!" The White Elite addressed in his booming voice. "Abandon your defense if only for a second, please. I feel that if we are to work together we must reflect upon one another."

The constant chatter in the room stopped for a little while, and then continued. A few of the Marines turned to listen, others were apparently too busy or too jaded to listen to an Elite Commander. Sergeant Johnson was more than happy to help.

"The MAN said to shut the fuck up and listen up!" The direct order from their Tactical Commander turned them all ears.

"Thank you, Master, Johnson. I would like to- how do you humans sayâ€|? 'Get down to business'.

"Not all of you may know this, but this very installation that you protect has at least part of the Key to the Ark. However, make no mistake, if we are to fall here, everyone you know and love will fall as well. Fight for your life, but more urgently, fight for them. Battle your opponents with the vigor you would show had your loved ones rested in that cockpit over yonder". He pointed to Miranda in the clear, crystalline booth. He then continued, "Send them swift justice in their name. The fate of the world rests on your shoulders, and likewise they should rest in your skills with your arms.

"To my brothers, the _Verrichpaunelli _or 'Special Operations'; we have battled and lived our lives in accordance to a vile lie. We have placed our peoples in danger by allowing ourselves to join the Covenant. Most grievous of all, we have destroyed countless human worlds. We protested in our minds, but not a single word was cried aloud. Staying your feet here and now in the path of these zealots is the quickest route to redemption. Like we pledged ourselves in the name of the Covenant, we shall devote ourselves to these humans. Only in better sense." He added quickly.

Field Master Zeyga bellowed in addendum. "As all of you can see, we have set up a many tiered defense. We will not allow any abandonment of your posts. If any two were to bear witness to a third retreating without direct order, the third would face penalty of death. The Brutes will surely try to overwhelm us. They will pour up the ramps, and try to 'zerg rush' our defensive barricade. Our main objective is to prevent them from gaining any ground unto this pier. The second objective is to tide back the venerable sea of enemies that will flood this chamber. Your human sharpshooters on pier number 2 and on the pyramidal structure will be responsible for this. Aim for any officers or enemy snipers that you should see before. Show them no mercy. When needed, we will give you word to retreat to the auxiliary barricades."

"Hopefully, the need shall never arise. I wish all of you luck in the coming battle-"Began the Elite in White.

"_Greetings, Heretics_."

"I'd recognize the voice of that old dude in the chair any day."

Sighed a nonchalant Sergeant Johnson, casually lighting a cigar.

"I do believe the Covenant Hierarch is making use of this vessel's exceptionally powerful two-way communication channels. Oh, how I do admire the floccinaucinihilipilificative (sadly) art of super luminal and geosynchronous communication. Tee-hee-tee-hee" The Monitor explained.

Truth continued. "_Do you all still seek to resist the will of the Covenant? The Covenant you have fought for only moments ago? You Elites were found too incompetent to serve us. It is not too late to find yourselves worthy mercy in my eyes. Why do you not step aside and allow us the right to our godhood that we have so labored for. You, who have no value for the Great Journey would keep it from us in the sake spite?_"

"You should not pretend to understand Halo, 'Hierarch'", The White Elite, said the word with disgust. "You cannot contend with the powers the Forerunners as left behind. You have misused their greatest gifts for the last time." He spoke these words high into the chamber ceiling. The warriors around him couldn't shake the feeling that he was arguing with an unobservable god.

"_Our greatest scholars have labored since the beginning recorded history to unlock the secrets of the Forerunners! Continue in this vein and I swear everyone around you will fall dead! You only show your ignorance when you speak of themâ€|" His voice quaked with barely restrained fury, "â€| and I will **NOT** be addresses so by one so devoid of the Great Journey's light_."

The words echoed in the now, silent chamber, that is until without warning, a lone grunt animatedly jumped up and down and cried, "NOT EVEN GRUNT WANT TO JOIN YOU, STINKY, CHAIR AND HAT MAN!" With that, the White Elite began to stifle a wild, uncontrollable snicker, as did his officers.

"Well that's rather commendable." The White Elite remarked having regained a small measure of composure. Then he couldn't take it any more. He and his men began to laugh uncontrollably. Soon the entire chamber was bursting with infectious laughter, passing from person to person with enough speed to make the flood flush with envy.

"The silence of the Hierarch at this moment truly attests to his embarrassment!" Laughed an Elite.

"He called him 'stinky'." Happily remarked a Marine.

343 Guiltyspark had a good, long laugh with an unwitting Sergeant Johnson until Johnson reopened his mirthful eyes and saw him. Johnson shot him a look, as if warily regarding the Monitor as a foe, Johnson patted him on his "back". They quickly resume their laughter.

"_Silence!_" Yelled the Prophet of Truth, who could hear every bit of it. They, of course, did not obey.

"Hey, Praetor, you know what's great about this whole thing?" said one Corporal Perez.

"No, I do not know!" The White Elite responded with glee, his eyes

tearing up.

"Either way, this thing goes, down his stupid ass is still gonna die! Soon as he activates this thing, he's gonna die. If he can't get to it, it's because I'm gonna kill him."

"A-ha! I like this ones style!" Field Master Zeyga yelled bombastically. He threw his shoulders back and laughed. Those who had heard hollered with even more laughter. He then offered a Hand slap to Major Eisley (Apparently he'd seen a couple of Marines High-Five or something). Eisley, having never felt closer to his former enemies, hesitantly obliged.

"_I will allow you your jest, but know this. You have left your opportunity of respite in tatters! You will know pain by the end of the conflict. It is evident that you all have a wish of death. Who am I to deny it_"

"YOU'RE A BIG, STINKY, HAT MAN!" chimed the same grunt again. No one was nearly as jolly this time around.

"Here that? He's going to 'allow us this jest'?" A Marine with a Boston accent said bitterly. "Like _he_ owns _us_? Let's smoke 'em F.T Zulu."

"Back to your posts, men" Johnson ordered. He heard the faint sound of the Brutes' footstep, faint only due to the great distance. The chamber fell dead silent. The footfalls became louder and louder, until they could feel the ship quake in their wake. They heard the terrifyingly loud voices behind the Forerunner designed gates.

Sergeant Johnson looked to the remnants of his Fire Team. "This is it, men."

14. Assurance is the word

Amadeus and the other young Elites, had by this time, dragged the crumpled prisoner from outside the ruined observation tower and into the dirty, broken streets. Amadeus couldn't remember the last time he'd seen them so lifeless.

"Has he awakened?" Bukil asked.

Before anyone could answer, the Elite lying in a heap on the sidewalk began to stir weakly.

"I dunno. Let us ask him. Are-you-awake?" Salkarise slowly drawled to the unconscious man.

"That'd never work, don't be an idiot." Amadeus reprimanded him.

"Yeeees-it-wooooould" The former prisoner drawled, imitating Salkarise. He sat up and cleared his head a bit. "You boys could have been killed." The old elite warned in a gruff voice. "Why'd you come for me? I was doing just fine on my own. It'd have been best for you to've left me. No solider is worth the lives of three others."

"Really? What if it's, like, three grunts and then a Hunter? Then what, uh?" Salkarise inquired.

The former prisoner just shot him a steely look, got up and then brushed himself off in a dignified manner.

"In all seriousness, you boys should not have rescued me." The unknown Sanghelli warned darkly.

"Well, they were interrogating you, sir. We rescued you for the strategic value entailed in such a mission. If we hadn't, who knows what sorts of information the Covenant would have eventually pried from you, sir." Bukil explained.

The disheveled Elite's opinion of Bukil rose a bit.

"Well, you can be assured he didn't do it out of sentimentality." Salkarise commented.

"What's your name?" Amadeus asked.

"My name's, Amaestradee. A'ligui Amaestradee." The man whom Amadeus rescued answered.

"Well, Amaestradee, you're going to have to get even angrier at us. We're taking you to the nearest infirmary." Amadeus sheepishly promised.

Salkarise looked panicked for a second. "No, no, no. We are not going back to Sibelius' convoy."

"Of course we aren't going back there. This whole assignment was a not so subtle means of getting rid of us- or sentencing us to death. I do know a healer in the 4th lower district. It's only a few miles north of here. I resided there after I'd left my parent's house."

"This is deviating too far from our immediate objective. Indeed, we should head back to Sibelius' convoy."

"Umm, no. How about we put a billion miles between us and that effeminate tyrant? Have you not heard him? He sounds more than a littleâ€| uhâ€| you know." Then Salkarise did a little imitation Sibelius and he and Bukil began to argue.

Amadeus turned to A'ligui and smiled, "It's settled, then. We're heading to the third district."

--

So the party of Elites walked along for a day or so, the passage of time blurred inside the space station of High Charity. The city still burned around them and the streets remained as devoid of life as ever.

"â€|I kind of miss him, somewhat. He was kind of a wanker and a yes-man and a poor fighter. But still, at least he would have agreed with me. We definitely should have gone back to the convoy. His little 'vote' would have at least evened it out a little. All of you

guys made it a 3 to 1 ratio." Bukil thought aloud.

"Do you really want to go off on your own and try and reach the Convoy? They are not. Waiting. For. Us." Salkarise explained.

"The idiot's right. You probably would have perished trying to go back there. With no one on foot to slow them down, the Convoy is probably moving as fast as their slowest vehicles. You and your little friend would have been on your own for days." A'ligui chimed in.

"I suppose I cannot argue with that, sir." Bukil said.

"Yes, it's more likely you'd have gotten hit by a patrol of Brutes or eaten by some Flood." Salkarise said casually.

"Flood?"

"The Flood don't _eat_ people." A'ligui clarified.

"_Flood_?" Bukil squeaked.

"The Flood are these little, tiny-"Salkarise began.

"I know what Flood are, dammit! It's just incredulousâ€|"

"No, there are no Flood in High Charity." A'ligui assured them. He couldn't yet walk, and had to be carried in between Salkarise and Amadeus.

"_Flood_? _What the fuck_?"

"No, I totally heard it in a city-wide broadcast. They were dozens of reports." Salkarise said, continuing to ignore Bukil.

"There were also reports of humans. I think a few too many people in charge panicked and said there were Flood simply because human weapons, human ships and humans themselves were becoming too common in High Charity. You know how those Prophets are. They severely underestimate humans." A'ligui disagreed.

"Yeah, like 'it couldn't possibly humans infiltrating our defenses, they just have to be flood'. You know what I heard? It was the demon himself who caused that entire ruckus in the Prophet's tower." Salkarise said.

"Noâ€|" Bukil exclaimed in disbelief.

"Yes, that's exactly what I'd heard."

"The demon himself?" Amadeus spoke for the first time, sounding awed. "If any human could sneak into this city, it'd be him. I'd say the demon could do just about any mission he set his mind to. Where ever he is, I hope he knows we're of like mind."

"Agreed." Salkarise agreed.

A'ligui could only roll his eyes at the blatant idolatry. However, he could remember being that age and remembered what sort of petty idols he'd had growing up. Idols like the Prophets. The same ones who were

calling for the death of all Elites. The old Elite wondered if any of the young men around him would ever live to grow old.

"â€|Back to my point; are the four of us any safer as a group, walking along these streets by ourselves? What difference would it make against a multitude of Flood or a patrol of Brutes? At least we would have been following a chain of command if we'd gone with the convoy. Now we're just walking around aimlessly." Bukil complained.

No one had an answer, so they just continued forth.

--

Master Chief and company waltzed through the dense jungles of Omega Halo. His mission, to bomb the ring to dust was going swimmingly. The jungles were alive and dark, almost a swamp in nature. Insects whined and droned, jungle predators made fierce cries into the forest. Distant splashes in the marshy water could be heard all through out the woods. This might have crept the Master Chief out a little, had he not been surrounded by a score of ODST helljumpers and two scores of Special Ops Elites, grunts and for the first time that the Chief had ever seen, four Special Ops hunters. Any of the dinosaurian fauna that inhabited the world wouldn't have had a chance against them. They marched undisturbed for a long while, and the Chief, being in proximity to Ser, found himself in earshot of his constant bragging.

"â€| Of course, by that point, when the fleet arrived, much of the planet's defense forces were already in ruins. There was very little left to glass at that point. The pitiful fight those creatures put up could hardly be called battle. Oh, how I yearn for the epic strife of my youth." Serlamras complained to a nearby ODST and whoever else was listening.

"That's great, that's great." The ODST, Sergeant Banks, uncomfortably replied.

"They weren't like you humans at all. No, humans, you would throw yourselves at us until the battlefield was thick with bodies. It was glorious! Though, it is good having men fighting at our side, a part of me still wishes to--"

"That's enough, Ser." Master Chief, commanded sternly.

"You've a problem with me, Dem- â€| Chief?"

"There's no need to call him, 'sir', sir." Sergeant Banks joked.

"Fair enough. I could see how it could be upsetting for you men to hear of your race's defeats. I suppose I would be upset had I been in the same position, I wouldn't really know. I doubt I will ever know defeat."

"Perhaps, only because you and the Master Chief have never met in the theater of battle?" Chuckled a nearby Elite.

"Forgive me if I am being presumptuous, but I hardly think that's the case. It's far more likely I would best the Chief in any given

battlefield; his Demons versus my chapter of the Special Ops, the '_Samra's aal._' Though, you are a great warrior, Chief, had our campaigns crossed paths, you would know death, in all truth." Ser laughed a bit to lighten the mood.

"Maaaaan, bag that. If you'd faced the Chief, you'd get your ass handed to you, admit it." Banks countered.

"Though the Chief is far older than me, I would say he has far less experience, it would be I who would beâ€¦ how did you put it? Oh yes, 'Handing the ass' in our confrontation." Ser countered.

"Yeah, but Master Chief has killed thousands of Elites, you've never fought a Spartan even once." Banks reasoned.

Their heated "my dad could beat up your dad" discussion was broken by a holographic image that had simply manifested itself into being in a burst of light on a nearby hill of sod. Nearly 100 rifles clicked as the company of warriors turned to look at the hologram. It was a green tinted, crackling image of Sergeant Johnson, worse for wear and with a long sniper rifle in hand.

_Chief, can you read me? Tinkerbelle says I only got a few seconds to deliver this message. You mustn't go to the Control room on this ring, it's a trap. Go to the library. The battle up here is going badlyâ€¦ you must fight on. If we dieâ€¦ _More of his message was drowned in static.

The Chief walked closer to the Hologram, the rest of the fighters looked on in disturbed awe.

"What's a trap? How's there a trap at Halo? The Covenant only just followed us to this system. They couldn't have set a trap. Let's be realistic here." The Chief demanded. After a pause he continued, "If you can't tell us, we'll be on our way."

_No, Chief. It's theâ€¦ _his next words were drowned static. _You hear me, Marine? Just go, now. Get the fuck out here, they're tracking you. That bomb you've got is a tracker. By no means drop it, though. _

In the hologram, rockets whistled right over the Sergeant's head and bolts of plasma and tracer rounds flew back and forth furiously. A fuel rod arced right over the good Sergeant's head as he ducked down. He got up and desperately fired off an entire clip of S2 rounds. Sergeant Johnson turned, as though listening to someone off screen. Then turned back to the Master Chief.

RUN, DAMMIT, RUN. GET THE FUCK ON OUT OF HERE RIGHT NOW. RUN, RUN, RUN. THEY'RE GETTING CLOSE.

The company looked about at one another, confused. They saw no danger. A hunter looked to the giant tree canopy above them and bellowed a bass note of horror. A thousand Flood, Combat forms leaped down from the heavens above them. The dark and misshapen figures were only silhouettes in the foggy, twilight air but there was still no mistaking them. As combat forms fell around them, the small army wasted no time and sprinted away. Only decades of disciplined training kept the soldiers from scattering in all directions. They ran for what seemed like forever. Gun fire sounded through the forest

and Master Chief chanced a look behind him.

He saw Sergeant Johnson still on his marshy knoll, but riddled with several sharp, crystalline Needler rounds. Time seemed to slow down as Sergeant Johnson continued to shout his counsel at the fleeing soldiers. Sergeant Johnson raised his fists to head level and cried out into the hallow twilight as the Needlers exploded.

End
file.